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BATTLEFIELD 2 P30

Explosive in-depth look! The future of war is here!

Crossed Wires

To mainstream or not to mainstream, that's the question on almost every publisher's lips these days. The answer is invariably a definite yes from the moneymen: mainstream equals more sales equals bigger bonuses, bigger cars, houses and yachts. But as a lot of companies are finding out, it's not that easy to dumb a game down and still have it work on every level. Stand-up *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, a classic example that proves you can have a solid cross-platform release, but one that isn't a classic on either.

The sorry truth (and this isn't a pop at consoles, just a sad fact), is that at the moment, the Xbox and PS2 are too far back to make a cutting-edge cross-platform game work. This will probably change when the next-gen consoles are released – but right now, too many games are trumpeting real-life physics and cutting-edge visuals and then delivering something that looks and plays like it was developed a couple of years ago.

Two games this month prove the point. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (see our definitive review on page 58) promised the world and delivered as much as it could while launching simultaneously on Xbox. But why should you be held back? You've paid cutting-edge money for cutting-edge technology on your PC, so why should you have to share the same experience as someone who's paid £120 for a box from Dixons?

Luckily, you don't. *Battlefield 2* (page 30) is unashamedly PC and is going to deliver visuals that make you glad you worked for a full year to get your new graphics card, as well as 100 players at once charging around maps and blowing seven shades of shit out of everything that moves. It's going to be a blast. But what about the consoles? Easy – the developer is making another game, *Battlefield: Modern Combat*, a title more suited to the technology in the box. It might cost a bit more money, but if you're in it for the long game then surely it pays to keep everyone happy.

Dave Woods
Editor
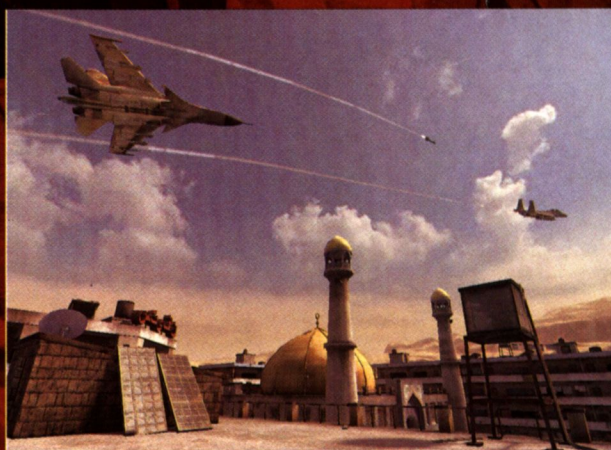
COVER DISCS P120 →

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"After seeing the first multiplayer map I swore with delight"

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FIRST Look!

YOU ARE EMPTY

Exclusive screens and info on 1C's Cold War sci-fi shooter

■ **COMMIE-BASHER:** Jamie Sefton

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER 1C Company
DEVELOPER Digital Spray Studios
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE 2005
WEBSITE www.youareempty.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- ■ FPS set in alternate 1950s sci-fi Soviet Union
- ■ Player character has special mutant powers
- ■ Latest graphics and physics effects
- ■ Utterly bizarre enemy characters

A MASSIVE killer chicken is stomping its way down a foreboding, 1950s Soviet Union street. Not the most likely image you'd expect from the Cold War, but Ukrainian developer Digital Spray Studios is taking a decidedly bizarre and twisted look at the Iron Curtain era for its new first-person shooter, *You Are Empty*.

The obscure-sounding name of the game refers to being out of ammo and the fact that your character wakes up, not knowing who he is or why he's in a strange town surrounded by hordes of mutant creatures. You soon discover that the Soviet scientists have been experimenting with the possibility of genetically engineering a Communist super-soldier, and it's you and a freakish population of monsters that have survived and are left behind to fight for survival.

"The twist is that from time to time, your character can turn into a mutant and has to find an antidote to halt the process temporarily," says Anatoly Subbotin, PR manager of publisher 1C Company. "But the advantage is that when you turn into a mutant, you get superpowers such as mega-strength, or enhanced vision. You have to strike a balance to progress through the story-driven missions."

KREMLIN GRAPHICS

YAE is going for a Soviet style of level design, with Communist propaganda posters from the period and the like, but it combines that with the silly sci-fi technology prevalent in B-movies of the 1950s. "You'll be able to use weapons of the time such as a Mauser pistol, but also have fun with a stupid-looking laser gun," continues Anatoly.

Enemies include a pack of Pavlov's Dogs, a mutant diver, who crawls out of the water to attack you, and an insane Russian boxer, complete with flabby frame and tatty boxing gloves. Oh yes, and the largest chicken ever seen in a videogame, which Digital Spray is promising will hunt you down through the levels using its sophisticated AI – presuming that a real ten-foot egg-layer would actually have a sophisticated AI routine. You can also expect realistic physics throughout, so you'll be able to fully interact with the decaying post-industrial environments, and send ragdoll bodies tumbling off ledges and down dingy, rusting stairwells.

KIEV CHICKEN

While at this stage we're not exactly sure if the mixture of a dark dystopian society and Monty Python-esque humour sit comfortably, you have to admire the development team's aspirations to make a shooter with bizarrely original characters. One thing we're convinced of though, is that *You Are Empty* is already looking gorgeous, with Digital Spray's own DS2 engine spurting out up to two million pixels per frame, including all the latest whizz-bang graphics card technology for jaw-dropping lighting and shadow effects.

With over a year of development time left, there are plenty of features to implement, including how the mutation powers will work in practice. However, it appears that the Ukraine is again showing enormous potential as a hotspot of very unique and daring PC games (such as *Stalker: Shadow Of Chernobyl*) that reflects upon the country's turbulent past. From little eggs, giant, mutant chickens grow. **PCZ**

He's just another cog in the Communist machine.

The industrial decay of the old Soviet Union is an obvious inspiration.

Much of *You Are Empty*'s environments have destructible elements.

If you encounter *You Are Empty's* mutant chicken without appropriate weaponry, it's you that's going to be stuffed.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS
Depending on how you play *You Are Empty* and the choices you make as a mutated Soviet super-soldier, you'll experience one of many different outcomes at the end of the game.

PRETTY PICTURES
The highly detailed DS2 engine is fully scalable, from 50,000 polygons per frame on low-end machines right up to two million polygons per frame on über-gaming PCs.

LOOKS FAMILIAR?
Is it City 17? Well, *You Are Empty*, *Stalker* and *Half-Life 2* are all set in decaying Eastern European/Russian cities, which seem a popular location at the moment for PC shooters.

PHYSICS LESSON
Digital Spray is implementing a realistic physics engine into the game, so you'll be able to shoot boxes and other objects in addition to ragdoll bodies.

SCARY MONSTERS
There's a very strange collection of enemies in *YAE*, including a genetically mutated diver, and this pack of slavering, killer Pavlov's Dogs.

BACK IN THE USSR
Set in the old Soviet Union during the 1950s, the game is full of authentic period detail for the weapons and environments, such as this rusty Russian banger.

BULLETIN

AN EPIC BATTLE

FIRST IT TOOK *HALO*, NOW IS MICROSOFT READYING TO SNATCH *UNREAL* TOO? *PC ZONE* INVESTIGATES…

MEETING YOUR MAKERS
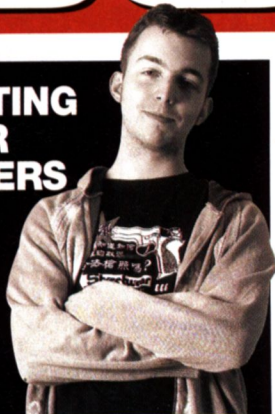
■ **NEWS WRITER** Will Porter

▲ There's a lot of good stuff about this job. First and foremost is the fact that you get to eat lots of chicken – since starting at *ZONE* this time last year, I've had more chicken than I've had impure thoughts. And not just one variety of chicken – all the chicken in the rainbow is available for a hungry games journalist. You name it, I've had it – satays, goujons, barbecue, wings, legs, spicy, tikka… The works. Everything. Every playtest I've ever done has left greasy marks on a developer's keyboard. Every interview has been conducted with a smudge of sauce on my top lip. I am truly king chicken.

So there's one good thing. But another thing, the thing that keeps me sane, is the fact that I now get to chat with the people who make the games I love. What's more, despite the fact that I've always felt myself to be slightly annoying, most of them are genuinely keen to speak to me too.

There are three reasons for this. First, games developers also like chicken on sticks. Second, I do have a habit of treating them like gods – and they like this too. Third, and most important, they are passionate about their work and (especially if they've been working on a game in secret for a number of years), they rarely come across someone who isn't a besuited yes-man: someone willing to objectively praise and critique what they're creating. As someone who adores gaming, it's an honour to chat to a developer about their aspirations for a product they're pouring their life's blood into – whether they're big-hitters or small independents.

So that's my story: I'm a lucky sod and I like chicken. I also like news, which you can see luxuriantly spread over the next few pages. Enjoy…

▼

BILL GATES' boys have been top of the *ZONE* gossip tree for a fair while now. First off, there was the BioWare takeover rumour. Now *ZONE* has picked up the scent of another, even bigger, coup – Bill Gates snagging the attention of Epic (creator of the awesome new *Unreal 3.0* technology) away from its established publishing buddies at Atari. Now, we hasten to add that this is unconfirmed – the peeps at Microsoft HQ delivered a swift 'no comment' to the suggestion – but we're prepared to eat our proverbial arses if it proves untrue.

We're moving on to highly speculative ground here, but it doesn't take much intuition to wonder whether Epic's awesome engine would debut on Xbox 2 before it did on PC – as it could provide some frankly stunning flagship games. But, like we say, remember that none of this has yet been confirmed by any of the big cheeses involved.

In other Microsoft gossip, it's also emerged that the step after Xbox 2 could be a meeting of minds between the chunky console and the humble PC. Microsoft has been testing the water in California with focus groups led by a company called B/R/S Group, asking what people thought of a device that would sell for $599 and could run Windows, burn CDs, play DVDs, be able to play PC games and also be backwardly compatible with all generations of Xbox software – whether running through a PC monitor or a television screen.

Cynics might recall the 'Mega PC' – Amstrad's abortive attempt to create a saleable hybrid of the Sega Mega Drive and a 386 PC in 1993 – but Microsoft reckon that there may be a market for a new generation of console-PC. "With a company like Microsoft, this is something we have to look into and ask about," said Microsoft's Peter Moore to newshounds at CNN. "Is it actionable today? Probably not, but it's something we need to look at. We would be remiss if we didn't look at consumer scenarios that take advantage of our strengths – but this is one among many, many other consumer scenarios that we're looking at."

So perhaps we should file this one under 'M' for 'maybe'. Whether the system ever goes beyond market research is up for debate, but it's worth noting that in recent months Microsoft has been tugging the Xbox and PC ever closer together with the unveiling of its dual-development XNA platform.

If, in 2006, we've renamed ourselves '*PC (And other Microsoft Products) ZONE*', you'll know that Bill Gate's magic 8-ball has returned a verdict of 'It's Definite' or 'Most Likely' – but until then we'll watch the big boys with renewed interest and try to work out which way they're going to take us. Until then…
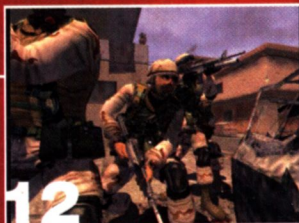
THE PC OF THE FUTURE? COULD BE…

X2 MOCK-UP Joe Roberts

"Is an Xbox-PC hybrid actionable today? Probably not, but it's something we need to look at"
PETER MOORE MICROSOFT

Blind Passion

EIDOS SERVES UP *SNOWBLIND*, THE FUTURE SHOOTER WITH AN ICY EDGE

EIDOS RECENTLY revealed to us that those busy bods at Crystal Dynamics, currently tasked with reversing the ailing fortunes of Ms Lara Croft, have another trick up their sleeve. *Snowblind*, named after the electronic shutdown after an EMP blast, is set to be a near-future war stormer with more death-dealing gadgetry than a year's worth of *Innovations* catalogues.

Seeing as you're slaughtering enemies several years from hence, there'll be *Deus Ex*-style bio-modding aplenty for you and your super-soldier team-mates – as well as 16 maps' worth of combat that take you into wasteland and jungle battlefields, and tactical incursions into enemy strongholds such as wrecked opera houses.

It's not a PC-exclusive release, but the Crystal Dynamics pedigree is enough for us to raise an eyebrow and wonder exactly what's in store when it promises that you can bear a 'riot wall' and a 'kicker' physics gun. Due out this autumn, we'll have more as it emerges…

■ **Publisher:** Eidos
■ **Developer:** Crystal Dynamics
■ **ETA:** Q3 2004
■ **Website:** www.eidos.co.uk

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow…

Snowblind: ice to (not) see you. Sorry.

NO MORE STINKERS

WARNER BROS MAKES RUBBISH GAMES A THING OF THE PAST – WHILE IN OTHER NEWS, SATAN GOES TO WORK ON ICE SKATES

FOR YEARS, indeed for much of gaming history, an official film licence has signalled an entirely mediocre game. Well no more (apparently), as the suits at Warner Bros have realised that a dodgy game can seriously damage a burgeoning franchise. Under this new quality control drive, any publisher that coughs up a licensed game for Warner Bros Interactive that doesn't pass muster with critics is in the firing line. A game that receives a score averaging below 70 per cent will result in the naughty publisher getting pumped for extra royalties – the worse the game, the greater the fine.

Although it's doubtful that the forthcoming *Matrix Online* will be affected in this quest for gaming purity (what with Sega handling such a large part of it), the entirely drab *Enter The Matrix* game would certainly have come in for some WB flak, seeing as its PC release has garnered a paltry average score of 67 per cent at www.gamerankings.com. Bruno Bonnell, CEO at *Enter The Matrix* publisher Atari, wasn't thrilled at the news. "We sold four million copies," said the big cheese. "That's $250 million worldwide – that's what a big major motion picture makes. And Warner Bros would penalise us because we didn't achieve 70 per cent? Are they joking?"

No joke Bruno. It seems the gamers have spoken.

SPECIAL REPORT
THE POWER OF PERSUASION

Politics, propaganda and power games are colliding on our desktops on a regular basis. *Pavel Barter* **asks whether entertainment is gaining a sinister edge**

PC GAMES can sometimes have persuasive powers: most often they persuade us to do innocuous things like stay up late, or refrain from going to the toilet for an extra ten minutes – but it's the subtle forms of mind control you really have to watch out for. Take, for example, online war game *America's Army*. On the surface this is a highly informed (and, dare we say it, entertaining) military sim, with accurate equipment and vehicles, sound and visuals – but it also doubles as one of the greatest marketing and recruitment tools the US has to offer.

America's snap-happy army needs all the good publicity it can get right now – and so it was that at this year's E3, face-painted US Special Forces soldiers, wielding machine guns, abseiled from a Black Hawk helicopter and stormed the entrance of the Los Angeles Convention Centre. Your correspondent did his best to dive for cover behind a giant SpongeBob SquarePants model, before remembering that the troops were here to promote their game, not necessarily shoot him for having impure thoughts about booth babes.

YOU ARE SPECIAL

The army's presence meant that security at the Expo was tighter than a gnat's arse (even *Half-Life 2*'s code was safe), and standing proud alongside his chopper was Capt Jason Amerine. This active Special Forces officer had been asked to motion-capture some *America's Army* characters and chip in with professional advice. A gamer from the age of eight, he was chuffed to be involved, although he'd soon be returning to active service in the wilds of Afghanistan.

"Last year, the Special Forces add-on was released," he says. "Now we're working on *Overmatch*. When we go to war, we fight to win with enormous firepower, intelligence, well-trained soldiers and great equipment. Behind it all is the soldier who puts lots of training into teamwork and tactical proficiency. In *Overmatch*, players can work together in a small group, fighting a numerically superior enemy."

You can keep telling yourself it's only a game, but for many players *America's Army* is the first stop on the road to Baghdad. A recent survey asked American youth to cite a source for their favourable impressions of the US military: 30 per cent named *America's Army*. This PC online shooter is more popular than a bottle of turps at a tramps' ball, with over 3.3-million gamers joining since its launch in 2002.

"*America's Army* is free for users," says Lt Col Casey Wardynski, the brains behind the operation. "We spend about $1.5 billion a year on recruitment. This game costs us about $2.5 million a year to create, so it's cheap in the scale of things. The game's communication is directed at 14-17 year olds. We want to be competitive in getting bright, technologically savvy kids – and in order to do that you need to talk to them about the army before they turn 18. There are links on our site to the army recruitment website and by the end of the summer we'll give the game away in recruiting stations. This is quite different to a 30-second spot on TV or a print advertisement – we can convey a lot more information."

Games are also being employed for other political ends. In the run-up to November's hotly contested US elections, games (for the most part crap Flash atrocities) have been cropping up right, far-right and centre to capture voters' itchy ballot fingers. The Republican National Committee is fighting the

America's Army showed the masses how it's done at E3.
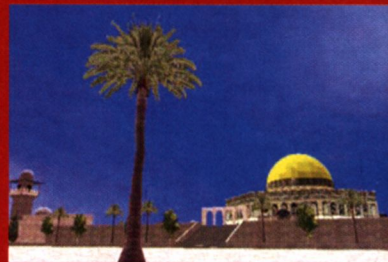
Controversial Palestinian shooter *Under Ash*.

Reds were better off dead in 1980's *Missile Command*.

Sgt Barter signs up for action.

The Pentagon invades your PC in *Full Spectrum Warrior*.

virtual fight with a website that features *John Kerry: Tax Invaders* and *Kerry vs Kerry*, a boxing game in which the Democrat challenger beats the bejaysus out of himself.

Ian Bogost of Persuasive Games – creator of online vote-grabbing games such as *Dean For America* – values these games because of their inherent interactivity. He says they force the player to think about what they're doing and consequently come to an understanding formed by their own mental processes rather the shallow effect of a snappy slogan or soundbite. "When you play *Deus Ex* or *Knights Of The Old Republic*, you must decide what other people's lives are worth," he explains. "When you play *September 12* (an online anti-war game), you decide to fire missiles into a Middle Eastern town and live with the

> ## "We want to be competitive about getting bright, technologically savvy kids – so we need to talk to them about the army before they turn 18"
>
> **COL CASEY WARDYNSKI** PROJECT DIRECTOR, *AMERICA'S ARMY*

consequences. This is a kind of power that other media just don't have."

It's not just the West dabbling in PC politics either. From Taiwan, 2004's *Everybody Fight* is a first-person shoot 'em up in which you get to kill off some of the nation's leading political figures. Bad taste, sure, but it's a huge hit in a country torn by riots and turbulent post-election fallout. Hezbollah, the anti-Israel militant organisation, released its first FPS last

Capt Jason Amerine motion-captured for *America's Army*.

Taiwan's politicians are the targets in *Everybody Fight*.

February. *Special Force*'s introduction features an exploding Israeli tank and a training session in which players take pops at prime minister Ariel Sharon. "Victory comes from no-one but Allah," announces the game before your first mission begins. Another Palestinian shooter, *Under Ash*, "is a call to justice, realising truth, preventing wronging and aggression in the Middle East."

NOBODY'S SAFE

Now even peacenik protestors have hijacked the PC game medium. *Velvet-Strike* allows you to spray virtual anti-war graffiti on *Counter-Strike*'s walls, ceilings and floors. Scrawled images of pink teddy bears, hearts and snogging soldiers have pissed off plenty of *Counter-Strike* gamers, but the mod's popularity is growing fast.

With news that the CIA is spending millions developing a game to help its

agents understand terrorists, it's clear that the age of innocent PC war games has passed. The line between the traditional games that aim straight for the wallet of gung-ho patriotism and those with slightly more sinister motives is becoming increasingly blurred. National feelings have always been represented in our gaming – in the early '80s, communism was the supposed great evil and, consumed by Cold War paranoia, we blasted Russkies in games like *Raid Over Moscow*, *Missile Command* and *High Frontier*. Now, however, governments and political groups have latched on to the trend, and have realised that it's one that both sells and works in their favour. Games such as *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* and *Close Combat: First To Fight* have full military backing, but you have to ask yourself exactly why such groups are so keen to embrace games and gamers – war simulations are no longer as innocuous as they once were.

Like most PC gamers, we will continue to play the games, whatever their motives – but we'll also maintain the mental barrier between their fun, wipe-clean, gung-ho action and the truth of the blood, pain and tragedy of the wars they represent. They are, after all, only games. **PCZ**

EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR *STUART CAMPBELL*

Monkey Island: are you a swinger baby?

Don't piss off the bunny.

Yeah, I'd say he needs help all right.

EMU ARCHIVE AT WWW.EXCELLENT CONTENT.COM/ EMUZONE

ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL

MOST MONTHS, Emu Zone operates at the borders of legality. For you, we risk our lives* to report on developments in a field illuminated only by the grey half-twilight of dubious morality. We tell you about emulators that in themselves are mostly legal, yet which in most cases you will have to consort with evil criminals to use. It's a bit like B&Q legally selling you a hammer in the full knowledge that you're going to use it to batter the inhabitants of the local orphanage to death. (Because, as we all know thanks to our pals at ELSPA and FACT, emulation is piracy and piracy is terrorism, and every time you use an emulator it directly funds Al-Qaeda's evil empire of paedophile Nazi pornographers, destroys society, etc, etc).

So every now and again, as we did a few months ago when we told you about some legit commercial retro packages, we like to keep within the boundaries of the law by covering some entirely legal emulation. This month is such a month.

As you'll know if you've been paying attention over the last two or three issues, one of the biggest gaps in gaming history is the one caused by modern PCs' incompatibility with slightly older PC games. Among some of the most fondly recalled titles of this incompatibility era are the SCUMM point-and-click adventures released in the late '80s and early '90s, chiefly by LucasArts.

Starting off with vintage cartoon spooker *Maniac Mansion* (SCUMM stands for Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion), the engine quickly facilitated a purple patch of creativity, with games like *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, *Loom* and the first two *Monkey Island* titles (which are, ironically enough, about pirates).

Another pair of SCUMM supremos, meanwhile, were the legendary Sam & Max – whose sequel was recently canned due to international terrorism**, to the loud disappointment of SCUMM-lovers everywhere. Predictably, today's useless, DOSectomied PCs have a crashing fit if you attempt to run any of these games on them, which is where ScummVM comes in.

ScummVM (standing for SCUMM Virtual Machine) is a simple framework within which most SCUMM adventures can happily run on your Windows desktop – either in full-screen or in a dinky little window. The interface is a breeze and the emulation works superbly, but the most notable thing about the emu is that it has the support of many of the original creators of the games. Several of the original authors/publishers of SCUMM games freely allow their titles to be distributed for use with ScummVM, and some games can even be downloaded directly from the emulator's homepage.

The versatile ScummVM has even been ported to console formats such as the Dreamcast (on which the games were never originally released), as well as to the Mac, BeOS and PalmOS. So now there's no excuse for you ever to find yourself anywhere in the world unable to play *Flight Of The Amazon Queen* or *Broken Sword* – free from harassment from even the most totalitarian and oppressive local law enforcement agencies. And it's all thanks to your chums at Emulation Zone!*** **PCZ**

LINKS

www.scummvm.org – the ScummVM homepage, with emulator and game downloads

* Actual lives not risked
** Cancellation not actually due to terrorism
*** Is not actually thanks to Emulation Zone

WHAT IS EMULATION?

By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

YOU ARE ALL SCUMM

The most ringing endorsement of ScummVM comes from developer Revolution Software – best known to modern PC users for the *Broken Sword* series, but famous in former gaming times for excellent and stylish games such as *Lure Of The Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky* (whose graphics were created by comics artist Dave Gibbons, of *Watchmen* fame).

"*Lure Of The Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*, both of which are ten years old, were running into PC compatibility problems," explains Revolution's avuncular head cheese, Charles Cecil. "By giving them away free, supported by the ScummVM emulation system, we're delighted that the titles have received a new lease of life. Furthermore, the titles are now available on a much wider range of platforms. It's a win-win scenario."

Emu Zone only wishes more people in the games industry were this enlightened.

Wise words from *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon.*

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A GTA FAN faces 15 years in prison following a **bomb scare** allegedly instigated by the popular **violent killing game**. Anthony S Jones claimed that phoning a **packed restaurant** and shouting, "There's a bomb in the building. **There's a bomb in the building.** Everyone needs to get out!" was a simple misunderstanding, and that his instructions were actually directed towards a **child** playing the **adult-rated game** under his tutelage.

Jones, 27, of Jacksonville, **Florida, USA,** a cook at the restaurant in question, shouted the **offending warning** while on the phone to a co-worker, who took the threat seriously. A night manager **phoned the police** and the building was evacuated and searched, with no traces of explosives found. Using all their **investigative skills,** the police used the phone's **call-return feature** to find the number and trace it to the house of a friend of Jones, who confirmed that he had been **playing the game** and had used his phone. Jones then delivered his story, before being whisked off to jail, with bail set at $5,003. There is no truth in the story that he also called a brothel and screamed: "**I'm going to beat you to death** with a baseball bat while listening to **A Flock Of Seagulls.**"

In other news, *ER*, the long-running TV hospital drama that reduces pre-menstrual women to tears of a Wednesday night, is being made into an **interactive 3D computer and video game.** Based in Chicago County General Hospital, the game features **stars of the show** including Noah Wyle (Dr John Carter), Mekhi Phifer (Dr Gregory Pratt) and Sherry Stringfield (Dr Susan Lewis). In the game, you have to deal with a variety of patients such as a mime with the flu and a **clown with heart trouble.**

Finally, the **National Rifle Association** is to sponsor Speedco Shooting Sports' PC game *Varmint Hunting.* A spokesman said: "The alliance has the ultimate goal of delivering **enjoyable and entertaining electronic games** to the shooting sports community and to offer a **low-cost opportunity** to all consumers who'd like to learn and **enjoy the shooting sports** in the comfort of their homes." From my cold, dead hands…

"I'm going to beat you to death with a baseball bat while listening to A Flock Of Seagulls"

ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Woof!

STILL HERE

News, of a sort, if you're waiting for *Duke Nukem Forever.* The news is, after seven years of development, keep on waiting. *Duke* bigwig George Broussard has claimed the lack of forthcoming information is because it isn't anywhere near completion. "What's the point of leading people on?" asked the super-tardy developer. "The best thing we can, and should do, is to shut up, finish the game and start showing it and talking about it when it's near enough to release that people can actually see light at the end of the tunnel." Same time next year then…

YOU'RE NICKED!

Valve Software recently announced that the FBI has made several arrests in numerous countries of people suspected of hacking and stealing the *Half-Life 2* source code late last year. Gabe Newell, MD of Valve said: "It was very uplifting to see how the gaming community rallied and tracked these people down." Hoorah for us! *Half-Life 2* is still slated for a "summer release".

MANIAC MANSION REDUX

The point-and-click adventure lives again! Witness the (unauthorised) rebirth of LucasArts classic *Maniac Mansion* – and rejoice! Go to: people.freenet.de/lucasfangames/maniac/games_eng.htm
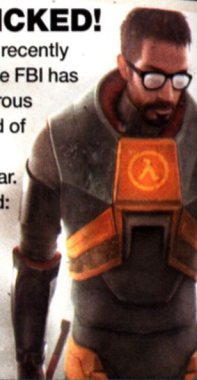
WE CAN DO IT TOO

…with Camgoo. That's because PS2's crazy video-work-out Eyetoy is getting a PC variant that'll turn your humble webcam into a device guaranteed to produce abject humiliation in all who use it. Whether you're swatting planes, balancing balls or attacking nasty jumping pirates – the chances are that you're going to look a bit of a tit.
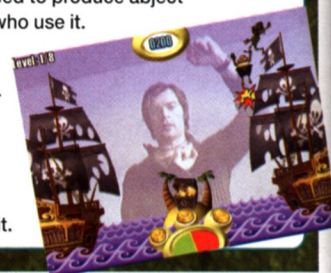
DIRTY GIRL

MEET DIRT, THE STAR OF *ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES*, AND LISTEN OUT FOR CHARLES DARWIN TURNING IN HIS GRAVE

"IT DEPICTS the struggle of a girl against her past and ultimately her future," explains Nick Bamford of Nu Generation Games as he gestures towards an Uzi-bearing punk chick wearing 'an emotive bear backpack' called Mr Boo. "It's a struggle of mankind against boundaries of science that it was not meant to cross and a struggle of political morals: to protect the people and act in the interest of the common good." All this and she wears a G-String while battling giant bugs? Sign us up!

So it is that you'll be taking Dirt, concerned-looking bear strapped to her back, through all manner of third-person shooting, fighting and insect repelling. "There are two distinct forms of enemy," continues Nick. "Your average 'run-of-the-mill' super-intelligent, super-co-ordinated, high-tech killing machine Marines (with support from land and air-based
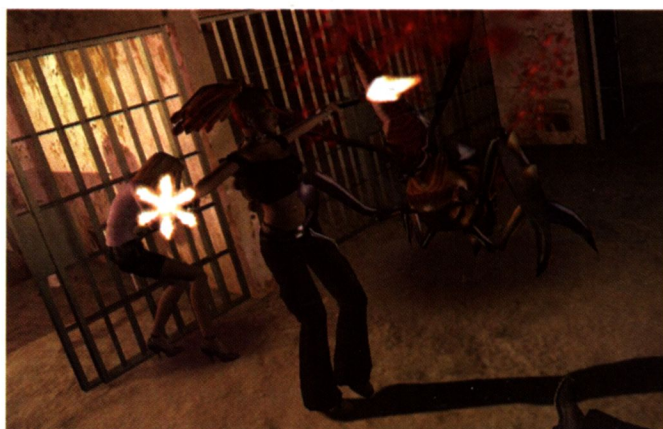
Better than *Bad Girls*: women in prison rock!

machinery) and the Insects – the result of a top-secret weapons programme code-named Project G.I.Ant." So, giant mosquitoes, wasps, lice and dodgy puns seem to be order of the day.

Based around a variety of Area 51-style conspiracy theories, a dodging and diving fight system and what's promised to be a fairly deep storyline (well, as deep as G-strings and insects can go anyway), *Origin Of The Species* and its Avril Lavigne-a-like heroine could turn out to be a pretty fun blaster when it's released this autumn.

■ **Publisher:** TBA
■ **Developer:** Nu Generation Games
■ **ETA:** Q3 2004
■ **Website:** www.nugenerationgames.com

JOURNO'S COMPO

IT WAS ONE OF THE TOUGHEST TASKS WE'VE EVER FACED. BUT ONCE WE'D GOT THE MAILBAG UP THE STAIRS THERE WAS ONLY ONE WINNER…

"Have you got the throbbing Mekon-like brain of Paul Presley, the raw Slovakian brawn of Martin Korda, or the tea-making butt-of-all-jokes capability of Will Porter?"

Back in issue 140 we put a call out to budding journalists and a fair few of you thought you fitted the bill. We've spent the last few months sifting and sorting and we've finally nailed down a winner. Stand up and take a bow **MATTHEW HARRIS**, from Launceston, Cornwall. Your critique of *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* tickled the judging panel, the piece on the state of PC gaming was snappy and the fact that you remembered to write, 'I also make an excellent cup of tea' swung the jury to deliver a unanimous verdict.

Your prize, as promised, is a paid commission for *PC ZONE*, with real cash money as a reward for your scribblings. We'll print the offending piece in the magazine and try to groom you (*Can we say that? – Ed*) for a successful career making hot beverages for the world's finest journalists.

Well done Matthew, but now the hard work starts.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

Dave Sutton, Daniel Crowley, Stephen Rowley, Andrew Parker, Philip Gardham

Some people say that second place is the first loser, but we don't subscribe to that edict and we'll be sending all of you a year's subscription to your favourite magazine starting from issue 145.

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

It's summertime, and the living is easy. The fish are jumping, an' the cotton is high.

Will working out the exact time at which Balham Sainsbury's starts marking down prices in its meat section. Result!

Jamie breaking some fundamental northern laws and buying everyone ice cream.

Suzy Wallace living it large in some of the more disreputable areas of Amsterdam.

BAD COP

A two-week issue? Are you quite mad?

Some bloke punching Ant in the face on a train. Long story.

The balmy summer days turning our office into a sweat-drenched, non-air-conditioned, hellish nightmare.

Jamie losing at squash to the mighty Woods and losing his racket to the wall.

Good Cop: **Gina Gold** (aka Irene Raymond). Bad Cop: **Gabriel Kent** (aka Mark Fowler RIP) – suggested by Will's girlfriend's nan in Nuneaton. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a *PC ZONE* goodie bag!
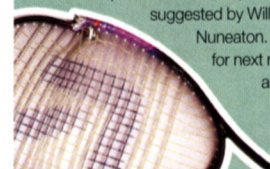
STRIKE FORCE VICTORY

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 EXPANSION CONFIRMED, WHILE EIDOS LEAK REVEALS SECRET COMMANDOS ACTIONER
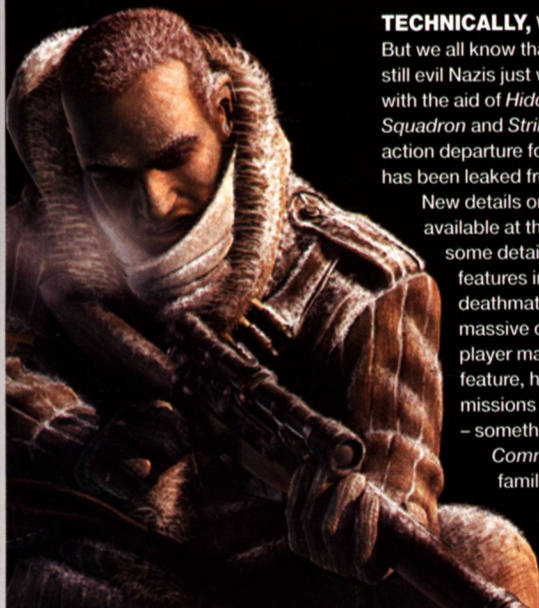
TECHNICALLY, World War II ended about 60 years ago. But we all know that deep inside your graphics card there are still evil Nazis just waiting to be foiled – and foil them you will with the aid of *Hidden & Dangerous 2* expansion pack *Sabre Squadron* and *Strike Force*, a hugely exciting new strategy-action departure for the *Commandos* series, news of which has been leaked from the bowels of the Eidos corporation. New details on both are sketchy; there were no screens available at the time of going to press, but we've dug up some details. *Hidden & Dangerous 2: Sabre Squadron* features improved AI, nine new missions, three deathmatch maps, three new occupations and two massive objective-packed levels designed with 32-player mayhem in mind. The most bowel-quivering feature, however, is that all nine of the single-player missions can be played co-operatively over the Net – something we've been pining after for years.

Commandos: Strike Force, meanwhile, sees the familiar figures of the Green Beret, Sniper and Spy enter the realm of tactical shootery – presumably in third-person form. You'll be kidnapping Nazi officers, blowing up vital enemy supplies and sabotaging evil

Another pissed sniper – red or white with that sir?

plans of world domination in Stalingrad, Norway and France – while switching between characters in typical *Commandos*-style and planning out your assaults with the necessary intricate detail. Eight-player online play is also promised – and if we find out that it too has managed to pack in a co-op feature, we're liable to run out of the office and dance in the streets of London.

- Publisher: Gathering (H&D 2) / Eidos (Commandos)
- Developer: Illusion Softworks / Pyro Studios
- ETA: TBA / Q3 2004
- Website: www.gathering.com / www.eidos.co.uk

indieZONE

DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

ONE OF THE more disappointing things about the world of games is its lack of crossover with other forms of culture. Bar licensed games of big-budget movies, games exist mostly in a cultural vacuum, never referencing the worlds of music, art and literature. If games make a point, or a joke, it's usually about other games – not about anything in the wider world.

It's odd when you think about it, because games are at least as of-their-time as other cultural forms (if not more so – good luck running your average four-year-old game on the hardware platform of the moment). All of which means you'd expect them to have contemporary references. This month's featured game doesn't exactly do that, but it's got some art in it, which is a start.

FREE PLAY

Star Wars – The Battle Of Yavin

Bruno R Marcus, 2004

FOR A FAIR while the *Star Wars* gaming franchise was one that'd been increasingly devalued by a slew of mediocre titles. In fact, it wasn't until games like *KOTOR* turned up that we got close to the legacy of much-loved games like *Tie Fighter* and the original Atari vector-graphics coin-op (still Indie Zone's favourite *SW* game by a mile).

However, through it all one plucky freeware coder kept on fighting the good fight, with a series of games that took *Star Wars* back to its roots. The latest is *The Battle Of Yavin*, a highly impressive 3D outing written with TrueVision3D and styled very much in the footsteps of the original arcade game. Check out the space battle section with massed ranks of X-Wings, B-Wings and Tie fighters, attacks on the Death Star surface and a climactic run through the famous trench.

It's a very simple game, with no fancy controls or weapons to get to grips with – you just fly around and shoot stuff. But with scores of fighters all pursuing their own private battles and great attention to detail, it creates a more convincing sense of a real dogfight than any of the recent official PC *SW* releases.

It's tough too, but you'll keep coming back for another kicking, because this is purest essence of *Star Wars*. And it's free.

URL www.bruneras.com – more information and *Star Wars* games by the same author
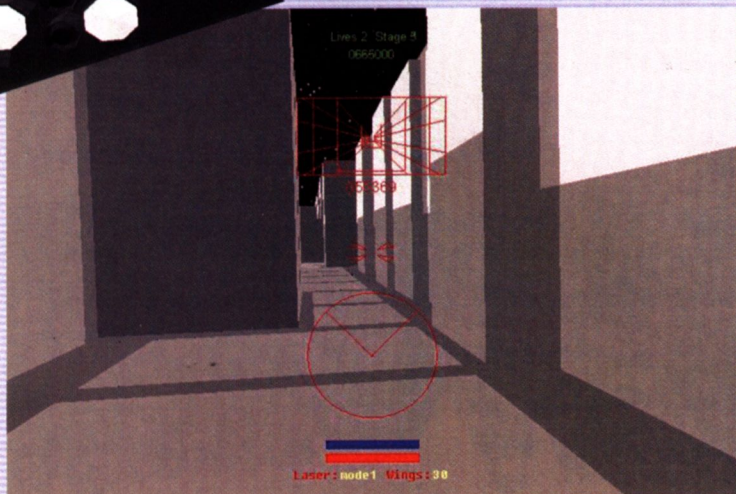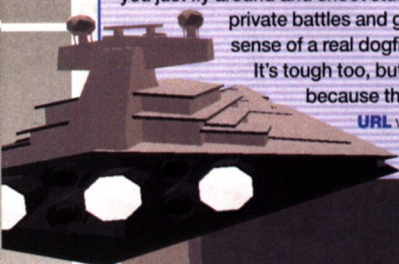
Not a lot of texture, it has to be said. But plenty of action.

Well, you'd shut your eyes too.

ART IS DEAD

■ $14.99 (£8) | Dev: Small Rockets | Out Now

REQUIRES PII 233, 32MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card

Stuart Campbell effortlessly destroys priceless works of art without setting fire to a warehouse

LIGHTGUN GAMES don't tend to crop up on the PC very often, and for good reason – you'd have to be pretty sad to sit pointing a plastic gun two inches away from your monitor pretending you're being presented with some sort of a challenge. (Except, perhaps, the one resulting from the gun obscuring your view of the screen.) Sadly, this fact has robbed the PC of some of the finest arcade games to grace other home gaming platforms, such as Namco's fantastic *Time Crisis* and *Point Blank* series. The latter – a bright, fast-paced cartoon shooter stuffed with blink-and-you'll-miss-'em mini-challenges – is the inspiration for *Art Is Dead*, a lightgun-style blaster (that uses your mouse), in which you participate in a wide range of mini-games set against the backdrop of classic works of art.

While the mini-challenges are neither as inventive nor as snappy as those in the *Point Blank* games, this is still a quick and entertaining shooting gallery game, with 'gallery' being used in a more literal sense than usual. It's arguable whether a mouse and crosshair negates the entire point of this sort of game, but it's certainly sent your philistine reporter off to find out what some of the priceless works he's been blowing holes in actually are, which automatically makes this the most edutainment-tastic thing since *The Typing Of The Dead*.

And, anyway, the joy of indie games is that at the likes of eight quid, they don't have to be mega-epics to justify their price. Indie Zone may not know anything about art, but it knows what it likes.

PCZONE VERDICT	79
We like	

Is this an installation or something?

Eric Nofsinger
Vice president of creative content at High Voltage Software

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
Today, I'll be playing *City Of Heroes* and *Leisure Suit Larry*.

What was the last videogame you finished?
For most games I consider myself 'finished' in the first five minutes. But if you mean literally completed: the very fine *Wade Hixton's Counter Punch*.

What is your favourite game of all time?
Three-way tie: *Super Metroid*, *Super Mario 64* and *Superman 64*.

What are you most proud of in your career?
White Men Can't Jump and *Leisure Suit Larry*. Not necessarily in that order.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
Peter Molyneux. He's an exceptionally ambitious risk-taker and supremely delicious cake-baker.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
Massively multiplayer online gaming, expansion packs, patches, that movie *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over*, graphics cards sales, and training our testers to become ultimate killing machines.

What's your company's philosophy?
Adapt or be destroyed. Sometimes at publisher meetings, we go with: 'Biddy biddy biddy!' and do the robot.

What's the best thing about your job?
Every day presents a new set of creative challenges revolving around hookers, gin and fine Cuban cigars.

What's the worst thing about your job?
The man-eating Bengal tigers that incessantly wander our halls. Although I'm grateful our overlords didn't settle for Siberian tigers.

What are you working on at the moment?
Tomorrow's hangover and *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Pornography. Or possibly the true realisation of social gaming. I'm fine either way.

ANIMAL TRAGIC

VIVISECTOR: THE RSPCA HAS BEEN INFORMED

"IT'S AN EVIL shooter. You can even shoot their eyeballs," explains Anatoly Subbotin, PR manager for Russian publishers 1C, while he points at a dog-mutant's wounded face. "As you can see he now has no eyes." Welcome one and all to the wonderful world of *Vivisector*.

"It's like *The Island Of Dr Moreau* meets *Soldier Of Fortune II*," continues Anatoly. "You're part of a special forces marine unit that's been sent to an island to suppress a rebel mutiny. But it turns out the island has loads of facilities created to test new types of superhumans – mixtures of humans and animals."

So it is that you find yourself battling humanoid dogs, cats, hyenas, leopards, rams and the like – each with their own localised damage zones. You can then shoot flesh from the bone, smash their heads until you see their brain and generally horrify animal rights protestors everywhere.

What impressed us though, was that, despite looking slightly behind the times graphically, the game contains an extremely innovative physics engine. This enables you to pick up the furniture and hurl it at oncoming critters and to make bullet holes in crates that you can peek through – rather than just watch the crate fall apart.

It's no *Far Cry*, for sure. But there's certainly some fun to be had here when the game gets its intended European release in the autumn. Even if shooting the faces off animals is somewhat morally dubious.

■ **Publisher:** 1C
■ **Developer:** Action Forms
■ **ETA:** Q3
■ **Website:** www.vivisector.com

So that'll be you dead then.

Having a laugh: hyenas with guns.

GROUND CONTROL II COMPO

WIN COPIES OF GROUND CONTROL II!

Here at *PC ZONE*, we reckon that if all world leaders had a copy of *Ground Control II* through which to vent their frustration, there would be no war – the international language of 'blowing shit up' would surely pacify the most ill-tempered of dictators. So it was then, that in the interests of mankind, we got ten copies of *Ground Control II* to distribute throughout the axis of evil. Unfortunately though, our publisher refused to pay to send any parcels to North Korea. So you know who to blame if it all kicks off.

This does however, mean that we have some goodness to bestow on you. Yes, enter our compo and you could be one of ten lucky readers to receive a copy of the fantastic RTS (it scored 84 per cent in our last issue) – including one copy that was originally intended for Robert Mugabe.

WIN BY TXT!
If you're one of those bloody trendy fools with one of those mobile car phones, you might as well use that to enter. So if you want to enter by text then send PCZGROUND to 83125, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name and address.

All text entries must be received by July 21. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

To stand a chance of winning, all you have to do is answer this simple question:

Who is the developer of *Ground Control II*:

a) Tiny Entertainment
b) Massive Entertainment
c) Ocean Software

Send your answer on a postcard (or text, see left) and fire it towards:

Ground Control II compo
PC ZONE
Dennis Publishing
9 Dallington Street
London
EC1V 0BQ

All entries must be received by July 21.
For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

Got the greatest game idea since *Doom*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – *PC ZONE*'s Search For A Game...

Hi folks! Back again with another round of the talent show to end all talent shows (about gaming). Contestants are piling up backstage as we sort the wheat from the chaff – and this month it's the turn of **Rob Mould** from **Wimborne**, **Dorset** to stand in the spotlight and make his pitch. Although he didn't provide a name for his idea (we made one up), he did sum up his tale of espionage and intrigue as...

"Splinter Cell meets Mission: Impossible"

The idea borrows heavily from games like *Splinter Cell*, but adds role-playing.

SHADOW OPERATIVE

IN THE not too distant future "(X)" works for various UK/US government agencies, his/her job to carry out the tasks they don't want to be associated with.

When the call comes in, you need to pool your resources to get the job done, from the clothes you wear to the ammunition you load. You need to prep every part of this operation. Satellite photos, building blueprints, friends in government – all can help you. But can you trust their judgement or their motives? That's for you to decide. From acquiring a floor plan to scaling a mountain, it's always your move – so make sure it's the right one.

Once your plan has been devised, you need to carry it out, infiltrating the location, acquiring your target and taking them out. If you wish to share the wealth, you can invite friends (AI characters or humans in multiplayer) to act as your eyes and ears, hacking satellites and CCTVs to help you on your mission. They can even join you in the thick of the action or, if you think they're capable, you can act as the eyes and ears and provide them with information and enemy locations.

As you progress you'll be contacted by other political groups and criminal gangs. The money's good, but can you get away with it without the government finding out? Also, as the game goes on you can improve your stats and skills, bringing increases in carrying capacity, accuracy and understanding of hi-tech gadgets, among many other factors, so adding a role-playing aspect.

H&D2 has a similar team-ordering structure.

Mission: Impossible relied on a similar planning system for the missions.

"This reminded me of every other sci-fi stealth action game out there, but at least it's commercial. Yeah, I like it, even though it is rather generic – but I feel that genuine innovations could happen with the online multiplayer side of things. Imagine *Battlefield 1942* crossed with *Deus Ex* and the movie *Mission: Impossible*, where you could be the commander, watching several agents at once, keeping track of the mission and warning your agents of any traps or approaching enemies. Could be very exciting." **Verdict: HIT!**

"There are some good ideas here. I really like the edgy plot and the fact you're not really sure who you can trust at any point, but you've gone overboard and really need to concentrate on a tiny portion of your brief and extrapolate. Faced with an empty pot, it's tempting to throw everything in, but there are very good reasons why the best dishes are created from just a few ingredients. Write the word 'focus' on a piece of paper, take the strongest idea from the game and create a brand new title. It could be a winner." **Verdict: MISS!**
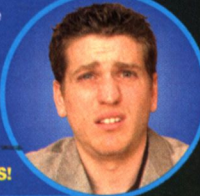
"So, it's basically *Mission: Impossible* then? Well it isn't a bad idea. With good execution it could be excellent, but I do have a few issues with it. The framework you establish – the RPG-lite, the planning, the equipment selection, selecting or ignoring missions – all those are great. But I'm not convinced that the nuts and bolts of the in-game action gel. By mixing up so many genres within the same engine, I can't help but feel that the end product will play like a watered-down version of the games it tries to ape." **Verdict: MISS!**

"Ooh, so close. Sadly, the majority verdict wins and despite plenty of promise (thought it was a winner myself), the judges have said no. See you next month!"

Send your ideas in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to 'Search For A Game' at the usual address. If any publishers like the sound of anything here, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk. (Well, you never know…)

EURO 2004 VIDEOGAME PLAY-OFF

PC ZONE

What chance England to win Euro 2004? Exactly. But what if

THE TEAMS

BULGARIA
The Punic Wars

CROATIA
Serious Sam

CZECH REPUBLIC
Operation Flashpoint

DENMARK
Hitman: Contracts

ENGLAND
Medieval: Total War

FRANCE
Beyond Good & Evil
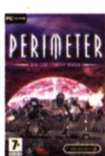
GERMANY
X2

GREECE
Postal 2*

HOLLAND
London Racer

ITALY
Screamer

LATVIA
Fighter Ace*

PORTUGAL
As Aventuras De Simão Na Rua*

RUSSIA
Perimeter

SPAIN
Commandos 2

SWEDEN
Battlefield 1942

SWITZERLAND
Air Offensive: The Art Of Flying

BY THE TIME you read this, the England football team will either have crashed unceremoniously out of Euro 2004 (something that's happened in every major competition except the 1966 World Cup), or be gunning for glory in the final of Europe's top tournament (bar this one, obviously).

We might not be able to accurately predict the results, but there are a few events we can say will have happened during the competition. First, Emile Heskey will have fallen over several times (once while sitting on the sub's bench after realising he wasn't going to get on the pitch and deciding that he didn't want to spoil his stats). Second, Owen will have missed a penalty (possibly two). Third, Germany will have made it much further than any pessimist could have predicted. Finally, the Dutch team will have had several arguments resulting in half the players standing on one side of the dressing room, with the remainder on the other and a chalk line in between the two.

But forget about all of that. This is the real deal. It's how the Euro 2004 Championships would have been played if *PC ZONE* was the head of UEFA. The rules are simple. Each country gets to nominate its best PC game, preferably commercial and in the shops, but if necessary shareware. Top two teams for each group go through to the knockout stages. The winner takes it all. OK? Let the games commence.

APPENDIX

*PORTUGAL
As Aventuras De Simão Na Rua
This really is the best we could find. Apparently it's 'an excellent guide of infantile security' and teaches children the dangers of the city. It doesn't wash with us. You might be hosts, but you're rubbish at PC games. Get out.

*LATVIA
Fighter Ace
OK, a bit tenuous, but bear with us. Mark Vange was born in Latvia, is the president of Ketsujin Studios and his code was used in the international smash, *Fighter Ace*. What do you mean you haven't heard of it?

*GREECE
Postal 2
Not exactly a Greek game, but they haven't made any decent ones. In fact, the only time they made the headlines in *ZONE* was when they tried to ban everyone from playing games, which resulted in us picketing (and getting chased from) the Greek Embassy. The result? We found a Greek company that distributes *Postal 2* and have put that forward as their entry because we know it will annoy them. And it's shit.

GROUP A

	played	won	lost	drawn	points
RUSSIA *Perimeter*	3	3	0	0	9
SPAIN *Commandos 2*	3	2	1	0	6
GREECE *Postal 2*	3	1	2	0	3
PORTUGAL *As Aventuras De Simão Na Rua*	3	0	3	0	0

GROUP B

	played	won	lost	drawn	points
ENGLAND *Medieval: Total War*	3	3	0	0	9
FRANCE *Beyond Good & Evil*	3	2	1	0	6
CROATIA *Serious Sam*	3	1	2	0	3
SWITZERLAND *Air Offensive: The Art Of Flying*	3	0	3	0	0

GROUP C

	played	won	lost	drawn	points
SWEDEN *Battlefield 1942*	3	3	0	0	9
DENMARK *Hitman: Contracts*	3	2	1	0	6
BULGARIA *The Punic Wars*	3	0	2	1	1
ITALY *Screamer*	3	0	2	1	1

GROUP D

	played	won	lost	drawn	points
CZECH REP *Operation Flashpoint*	3	2	0	1	7
GERMANY *X2*	3	2	0	1	7
LATVIA *Fighter Ace*	3	0	2	1	1
HOLLAND *London Racer*	3	0	2	1	1

EURO 2004

...t if it were judged on PC games instead of football? *PC ZONE* investigates...

QUARTER-FINAL 1

Perimeter
(Russia) **2**
vs
Beyond Good & Evil
(France) **3**

An excellent match, but the criminally underrated *Beyond Good & Evil* storms into a 3-1 lead before weird Russian RTS *Perimeter* sets up a thrilling finale when it bamboozles the French defence with its manual. The French hold on though, and move through to the semis.

QUARTER-FINAL 2

Medieval: Total War
(England) **3**
vs
Commandos 2
(Spain) **1**

Commandos 2 is still better than the third instalment, but no match for the heroic English. We nearly get disqualified for fielding thousands of troops on the pitch at one time, but common sense prevails.

QUARTER-FINAL 3 (AET)

Battlefield 1942
(Sweden) **2**
vs
X2
(Germany) **1**

The closest to call yet, and Paul Presley is heard to mutter 'don't make me choose between my children' as the game moves into extra time a goal apiece. The game's just about to go to penalties when the already slow-paced *X2* stops moving entirely, enabling *Battlefield 1942* to crash-land in the space sim's goal.

QUARTER-FINAL 4

Operation Flashpoint
(Czech Republic) **4**
vs
Hitman: Contracts
(Denmark) **0**

Quite frankly we're surprised *Hitman: Contracts* made it this far, but *Operation Flashpoint* proves the Danish effort is out of its depth at international level. It's a thrashing, and the tactical shooter storms into the semis.

SEMI-FINAL 1

Beyond Good & Evil
(France) **0**
vs
Battlefield 1942
(Sweden) **1**

Crispbread and Ulrika Jonsson. That's what Sweden was famous for before *Battlefield 1942* was spat out of Scandinavia. And now look – one online game later and they're in the finals of the European Championships.

SEMI-FINAL 1 (AET)
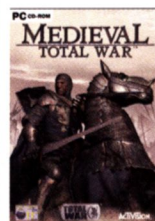
Medieval: Total War
(England) **1**
vs
Operation Flashpoint
(Czech Republic) **0**

It couldn't have been closer. The two heavyweights of the tournament don't exactly put on a thrilling display for the assembled crowd, but after about 187 hours of solid football, *Medieval* pips it by taking the ball to the top of a hill, behind a group of archers, and refusing to come down.

FINAL

Battlefield 1942
(Sweden) **2**
vs
Medieval: Total War
(England) **2**
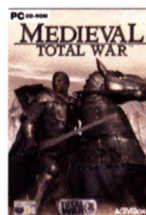
(*Battlefield 1942* wins 4-3 on penalties)

The idea behind this feature was that England wouldn't win Euro 2004, so we'd do this and have England win here instead. But guess what? We lost on penalties in the final. Bastards.

THE WINNER
BATTLEFIELD 1942
(SWEDEN)

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

An insightful look into the best games of the moment? Or a snapshot of our rubbish taste in entertainment? A bit of both really. Here are the UK charts...

ChartTrack TOP 10

ELSPA
EUROPEAN LEISURE SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION LTD

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT	60%
2	▼	FAR CRY	UBISOFT	93%
3	▼	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
4	–	THE SIMS	EA	86%
5	–	BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA	87%
6	NEW	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS	72%
7	▼	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI	91%
8	▼	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS	89%
9	RE	THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA	55%
10	NEW	R.O.N: THRONES & PATRIOTS	MICROSOFT	89%

Well, we didn't see this one coming did we? We knew it was popular, but popular enough to break down the doors of the PCZ charts? What's the next Channel Five gaming blockbuster? *Was Hitler Gay Online*? A *Family Affairs* FPS? The mind boggles...
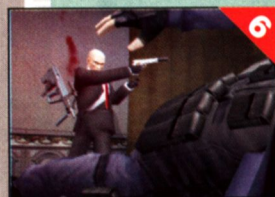
He's bald, he's thoroughly wicked and he now finds himself in more compromising situations with dead women in their pants than ever before. Dragging a naked fat man and looking malevolent, Agent 47 crashes into the charts at number six.

Whether you're reliving QPR's glorious promotion season, or watching Leeds slowly sink into the mire, *Champ Man* should be your first point of call. Who needs Euro 2004 when you've got this lovely spreadsheet as your friend?

One of the most proficient expansion packs we've seen in ages coupled with the already-excellent *Rise Of Nations* has made a lot of empire-builders very happy. It's certainly worked for us, our warmongering going up by a massive 117 per cent in the past month...

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

How did *CSI's* game reach number one? I think we should set up a Crime Scene Investigation to find out where it grew up, how many children it has and who purchased it. To the Batmobile!
Jason_6780

Replace *CSI* with *The Sims* and you've got EA's master game of all time. *The Sims: Dark Motives*.
rjcanty

It looks like *Singles* only enjoyed a brief spurt to the number one spot before flopping back down again. Ahem.
Escaped_monkey

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1.	RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	UBISOFT
2.	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT
3.	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS
4.	FAR CRY	UBISOFT
5.	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
6.	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
7.	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
8.	UEFA EURO 2004	EA
9.	SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE	DEEP SILVER
10.	THE SIMS	EA

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which of the following 'Rise Of' games is a work of fiction, made up by us?

A Rise Of The Robots   **B** Rise Of The Valkyries   **C** Rise Of The Triad

Send your answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 144, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: July 21, 2004

■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
■ Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

To enter the competition by text: send PCZVIRGIN, to 83125, with your answer (a,b, or c), plus your full name and address.

■ All text entries must be received by July 21. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE COMING MONTHS. THESE ARE ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES, CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

JULY
AIRBORNE TROOPS	GMX MEDIA
ALPHA BLACK ZERO	GMX MEDIA
AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED	SYSTEM 3
JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
MASHED	EMPIRE
NHL EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER	SEGA
SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II	CODEMASTERS
SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE 2	ACTIVISION
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2004	CODEMASTERS

AUGUST
CATWOMAN	EA
CHAOS LEAGUE	DIGITAL JESTERS
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004	JALECO

SEPTEMBER
CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
KNIGHTS OF HONOR	SUNFLOWERS/EA
LULA 3D	CDV
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
PORT ROYALE 2	ASCARON
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	ACCLAIM
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ

Q3
CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS

OCTOBER
BLOODRAYNE 2	MAJESCO
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT	HD INTERACTIVE
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES

Q4
ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GATHERING
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
JUICED	ACCLAIM
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
PARIAH	HIP GAMES
PRINCE OF PERSIA 2	UBISOFT
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
SPLINTER CELL 3	UBISOFT
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

TBA 2004
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA

2005
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

THE SAGA OF RYZOM

ORIGINALLY slated for a June release, this environmentally-friendly MMOG has been thrown into the tinkerer's workshop for another few months. Beta-tester quibbles should have been ironed out by September – but with *EverQuest II* ready to roll soon after, it may have some fierce competition.

- ■ **Publisher:** Nevrax
- ■ **Developer:** Nevrax
- ■ **ETA:** September
- ■ **Website:** www.ryzom.com

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004
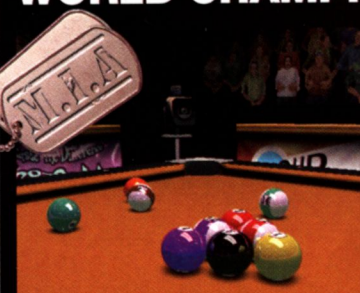
WE REVIEWED it last issue and so can't quite make out why this pool sim has been tugged back into the stable. The game's finished, so we can only guess there's some form of internal wranglings going on at Jaleco. Whatever the case, it's not out till August.

- ■ **Publisher:** Jaleco
- ■ **Developer:** Blade Interactive
- ■ **ETA:** August
- ■ **Website:** www.jaleco.co.uk

THE ROOTS

WITH SOME pretty robust visuals and an approach that's a step away from the normal crowd, we quite like the look of this Eastern-style RPG. Unfortunately, we won't be seeing it for a while – its Polish developer and Cenega have decided to hold fire until the start of next year.

- ■ **Publisher:** Cenega
- ■ **Developer:** Tannhauser Gate
- ■ **ETA:** Q1 2005
- ■ **Website:** www.theroots-game.com

TOP 10 GREATEST GIANT FPS VILLAINS

1. **CYBERDEMON** (ROCKET-TOTING *DOOM* SUPREMO)
2. **SHAMBLER** (TERRIFYING *QUAKE* ELECTRO-SLOTH)
3. **MECHA-HITLER** (*WOLFENSTEIN 3D* DICTATORIAL KILLING MACHINE)
4. **GARGANTUA** (*HALF-LIFE* RED-EYED AIRSTRIKE TARGET)
5. **BLOODY BIG DEMON** (*SERIOUS SAM* GOLIATH)
6. **SPIDER MASTERMIND** (*DOOM* ARACHNID/BRAIN THING)
7. **CYCLOID EMPEROR** (*DUKE NUKEM 3D* FOOTBALL FAN)
8. **SAPHATHORAÉL** (HAMMER-WIELDING *PAINKILLER* BASTARD)
9. **FATBOY** (*FAR CRY'S* LUMPS OF MUSCLE)
10. **ALIEN QUEEN** (*ALIEN VS. PREDATOR* SHE-BITCH)
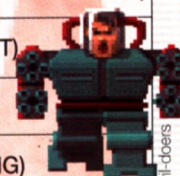
HOT SHOTS

Form Up

x4
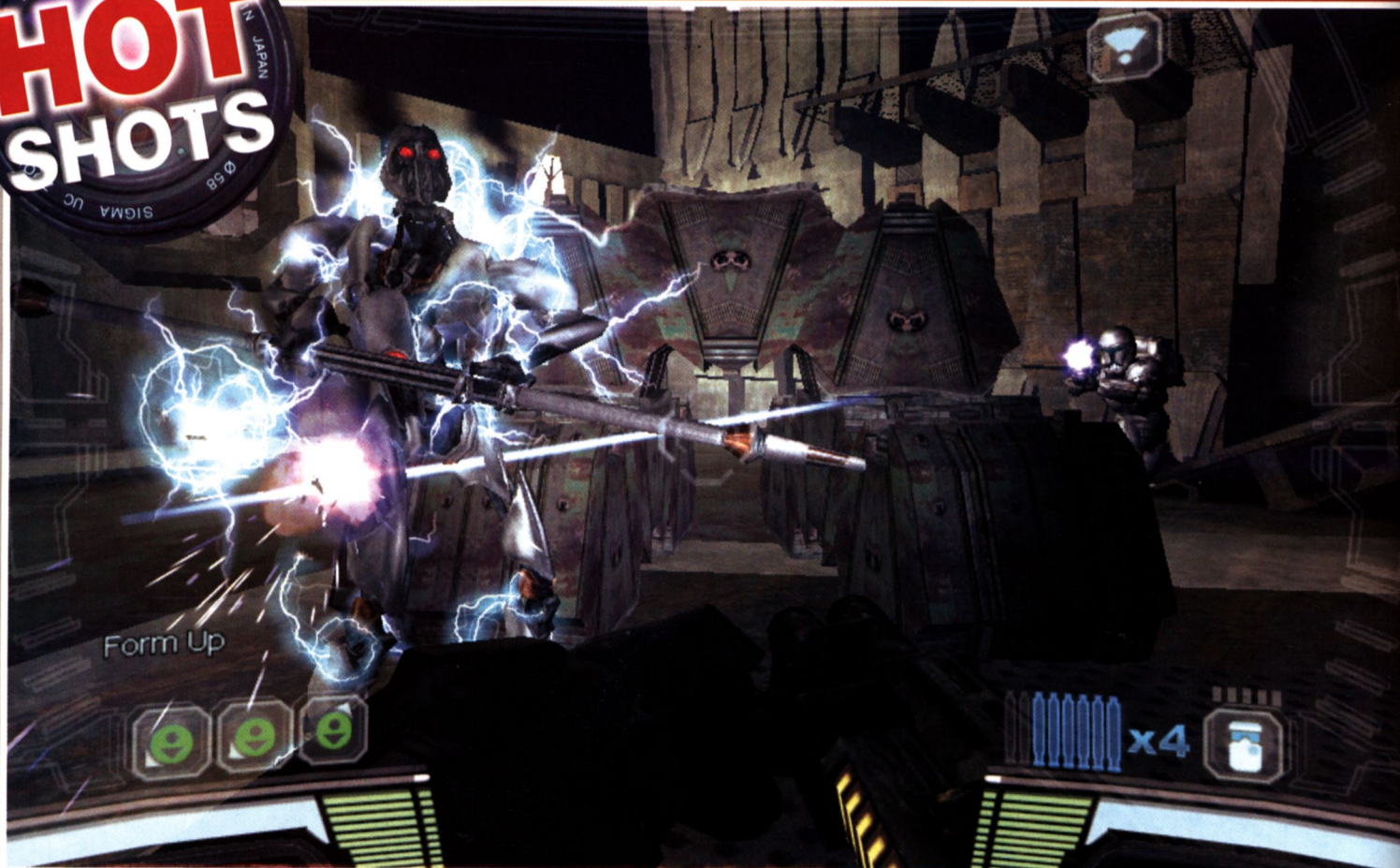
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Fight the good Republican fight in the ranks of the   clones who would be Stormtroopers

FOR SEVERAL years there's been a period of civil war over the burgeoning *Star Wars* franchise but, whether you're a solemn naysayer or remain a blinkered pilgrim to the Lucas shrine, we reckon everyone will agree that blasting Geonosians with big guns and a bunch of cloned buddies is going to be great fun.

Republic Commando certainly won us over at E3, its streamlined squad dynamics and some pretty intuitive AI suggesting that your various incursions behind enemy lines won't necessarily result in the normal whitewash that you're presented with when a sci-fi shooter is developed with both console and PC in mind. We're promised guest-star appearances from *Episode III's* dastardly wicked General Grievous and his consort of elite bodyguards, while Wookiee homeplanet Kashyyk will presumably offer ample places to hide behind trees and more than a touch of heavy bow-caster action.

We're still not sure, though, whether the game addresses the fact that the Commandos should look and sound like a dead-pan guy from New Zealand (whose son pronounces the word 'dad' as 'did'). Only time will tell.

- **Publisher:** LucasArts
- **Developer:** Activision
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.lucasarts.com
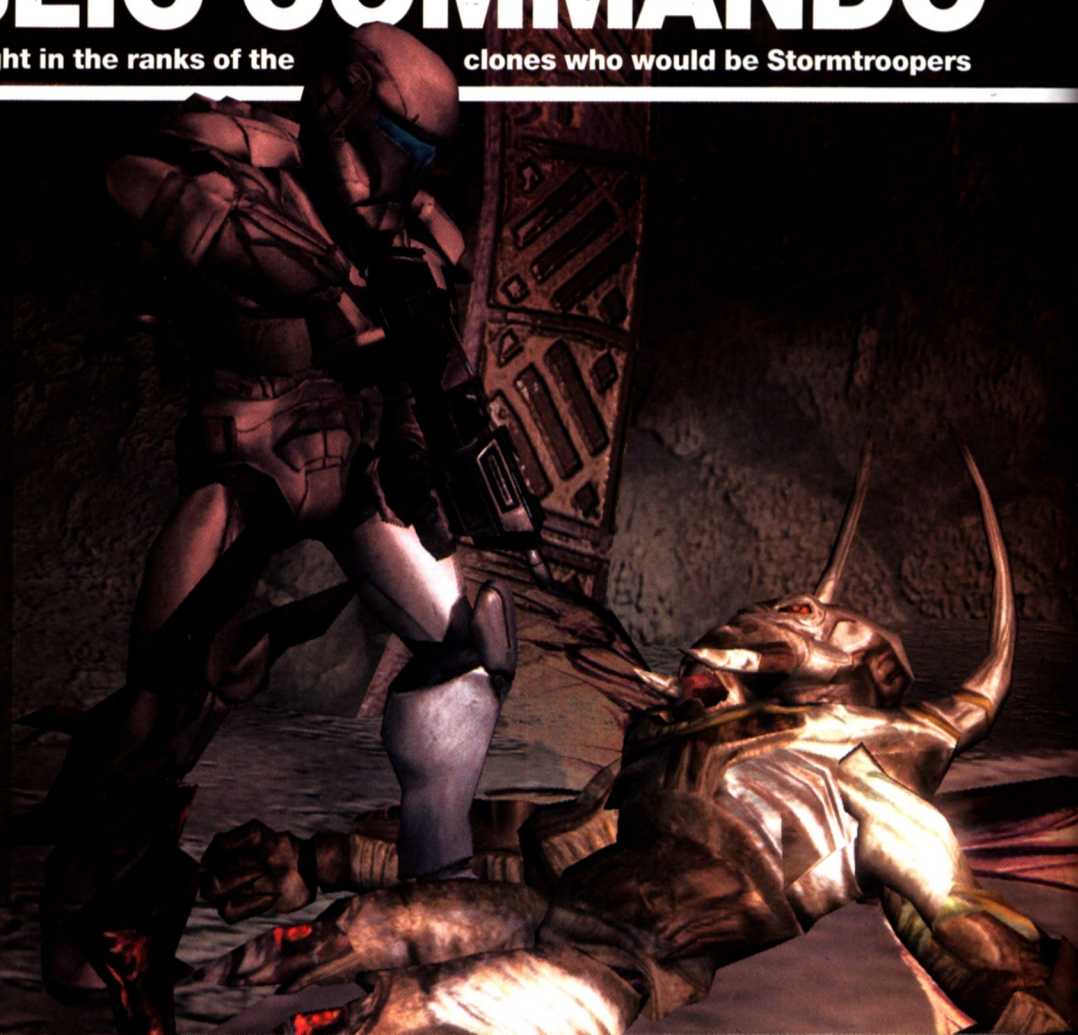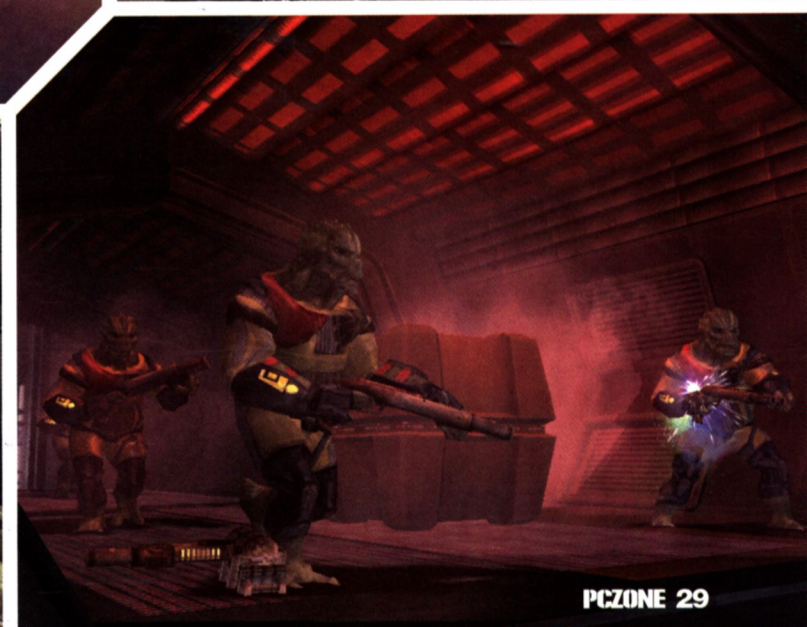
THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER DICE Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.eagames.com
ETA Spring 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Battlefield*, but with up to 100 players per map
- Modern-day warfare, with brand new vehicles and weapons
- Commander mode provides a strategic overview for the fighting
- In-game voice comms

The future of war is here...
BATTLEFIELD 2

Leader of men, master of arms, hoarder of tinned pies. *Paul Presley* is all set for the coming battles

CV

DICE STUDIOS

DICE, Digital Illusions, DI Studios – whatever your preferred nom de plume for the Swedish developer may be, you can't ignore the affect it's had on the online shooter world since *Battlefield 1942* arrived.

1988 The idea for a pinball game arrives while one of DICE's founders holidays at his parents' summer cottage.

1992 Several pinball games later and the team is earning a reputation for development.

2000 *Codename: Eagle* is released, setting the template for online shooters before the world was ready to listen.

2002 *Battlefield 1942* takes the template into the modern era – and this time the world notices big time.

2004 *BF1942* expansion packs, a spin-off company in Canada with a semi-sequel set in Vietnam and more active gaming servers than almost any other online shooter. What will 2005 hold?

> ## "We have a pretty good recipe for success – one third old, one third new and one third improved"
> **SEAN DECKER**
> PRODUCER, *BATTLEFIELD 2*
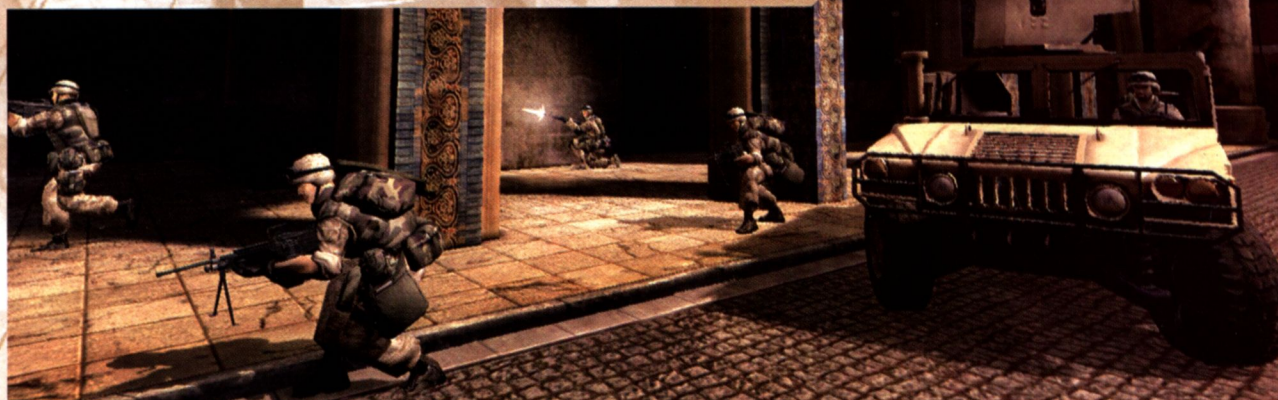
The new Squad Leader system means each game has the potential to be a more structured and exciting affair. Or a horrible mess if your leader is a moron.

THERE'S a truism in the world of marketing, oft ignored it must be said, that goes: you can't polish a turd. No matter how much you shake things up with visual finery, how many designs and redesigns you go through, unless the meat of your metaphorically-mixed stew is well cooked and tasty, all you're going to be left with is good-looking dishwater.

Having seen the jaw-dropping screens and shaky-cam movies of *Battlefield 2* that slipped out of E3 and onto porn site browsers the world over, you may well have been jaded enough to think: "Sure, looks nice but it'll probably just be the same old game with modern tanks and that." Luckily for all of us, DICE Studios is only too aware of what's required to challenge those widely-held preconceptions.

"We have a pretty good rule, or recipe, that we follow which is: 'one third old, one third new and one third improved'," says *Battlefield 2* producer Sean Decker from his cool and pleasant Swedish office. "There are those things you really want to keep that are fun and make the game what it is. When someone opens up *Battlefield*, they expect a certain experience. But there are still things that people wish they could've had in *BF1942*, so that's the

'improved' part for us. But also, when you open up the box you expect something new. You don't expect to pay your 50 euros for something that's just the same experience rehashed. We have to try and balance all these factors."

AFTER EFFECTS

You can't throw a stick onto the Internet these days without hitting a *Battlefield* server. The phenomenal success of the original game had a lasting effect on the world of online gaming in a way not seen since *Counter-Strike*. "It's a little bit overwhelming, definitely," admits Decker. "It's interesting that whenever we pick up a magazine, we find dozens of references to *Battlefield*, but in articles about other games. It's something that a lot of other designers always get asked – are they going to go in our direction with their games. But even with all of that, we really aren't seeing a lot of games coming in our direction."

That said, the *Battlefield* trends are certainly picked up on – witness how

'Not the fairest fight the world has ever seen.

every game that arrives nowadays features sprawling levels and vehicles with multiple player mounts. Of course, *BF1942* pioneered vehicle use (well, *Codename: Eagle* actually pioneered it, but no-one remembers). For *Battlefield 2*, the 'improved' part of the recipe takes this into account.

"Every position in a vehicle will be usable," assures Decker. "No more sitting in the back of an APC waiting to die because the guy driving it ran into a tank somewhere. If you're in the back of an LAV troop carrier, you can shoot through the firing ports. If you're in a Humvee, you can use your hand weapon to shoot out through the windows."

TOOLED UP

Artillery is also getting an overhaul for the sequel. Decker freely volunteers that in *BF1942*, the concept was an unintelligible mess that was hardly ever used. "It was horrible," he grimaces. "If that wasn't in the game, it would still have been fine. So that was one of the things that we wanted to make dead, dead simple. If you're in the backseat of an F-15 Strike Eagle and some guy on the ground laser paints something, you hear, 'I've got a target, drop a bomb', and you see instructions on how to do it.

> "We find dozens of references to *Battlefield* in articles about other games"
>
> **SEAN DECKER**
> PRODUCER, *BATTLEFIELD 2*

We're assured that DICE is keeping the 'simulation' side to a minimum.

Armed conflict in the Middle East? Now who could have seen that coming?

Press this button to fire the missile, or this button to select another pilot. Whatever you need to do will be simple and you'll be able to understand it. It's a pet peeve of ours and we're determined to make it work in terms of simplicity."

FUTURE WAR

Being set in the Near Future, in a three-way war between the US, China and a Middle Eastern coalition fed up with the US imposing its will on everyone ("We're just creating sandboxes to play in," says Decker prudently. "We stay out of the politics of it all"), there's a lot more than just F-15s on the table in terms of equipment.

"Our general rule for creating anything was that any vehicle that's either in use now or that's being prototyped now is an ideal candidate," reveals Decker. "Something like the Joint Strike Fight, for instance. Not in

production right now, but it's in testing and has been ordered by various military forces, so that might well be in there."

Ground vehicles are more of an issue, especially tanks. Since WWII, most major armed forces (and certainly the ones in the game) have scaled back to just one or two variants. The M1 Abrams for the US, the T-72 for the Russians, the Challenger for us Brits. In order to add variety to the game, DICE has had to take the basic templates for each type and rather than alter the models, instead provide differing equipment for each. So you've got the M1 with mine clearing

equipment on one map, or the heavy metal one with greater levels of armour on another.

"Modern weaponry means things aren't just about being in a different era – they change the gameplay too," says Decker. "That's a challenge, but it gives us a lot more grist to play with and more ways to play the game."

So far it's all 'improvement'. What of the 'new'? The most notable change for

RIPPING STUFF

THINK YOU'RE SAFE INDOORS? THINK AGAIN

"It's selective in terms of what can be destroyed. Players being players, we wouldn't have a battlefield left if everything was destructible." Producer Sean Decker is so in tune with the mindset of most online gamers it's scary. "I can totally see three guys just getting into tanks and blowing up everything in sight until everyone's just playing in a big desert."

One of the big leaps forward for *BF2* is that scenery is no longer invulnerable to your gunfire. Aside from bullet penetration of doors, walls and so on, hi-ex weapons can lay waste to much more than just human tissue.

"It was always frustrating to chase some guy in a Tiger tank and he'd run into a shack and be safe," explains Decker. "We basically decided that it'd be much more interesting to let somebody blow that shack up, or at least put bullets through it. We think it's going to change the way people play in terms of when hiding behind a bush or a concrete wall, you'll understand that the bullets are going to go through the bush." And then through you.

No exploding barrels though. That's silly.
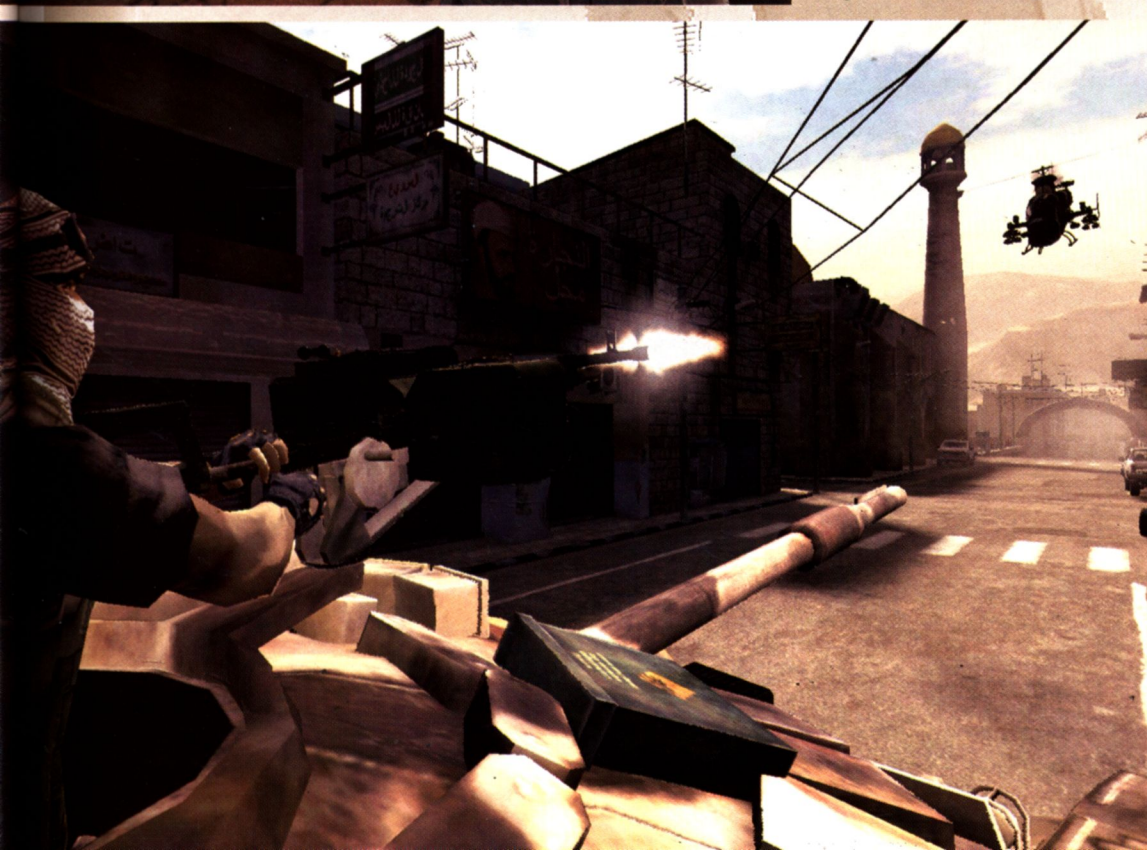
Why Don't You?...

Five's company, a hundred's a crowd. But a thousand...

THINK OF IT AS *BATTLEFIELD: FLASHPOINT – COLD WAR CRISIS*

The temptation for a sequel is always to want to make things bigger, bigger, BIGGER! With maps already large enough to support 100 players, you may be wondering how much bigger DICE can go. But then, you might also remember a little game from a few years back called *Operation Flashpoint*.

DICE might not yet be ready to head down the persistent world *PlanetSide* route with the *Battlefield* franchise, but there could be an interim solution by having a *Flashpoint*-sized, total island map hosted permanently on several EA servers. This could have dozens of control points scattered all over, along with safe zones that can't be attacked by the enemy – from where the commanders and squad leaders can plan out detailed attacks.

Battlefield 2 has come as a result of the increase in player numbers on each map. With servers now capable of supporting up to 100 players (possibly more depending on how well current testing at the DICE office goes), there needs to be a streamlined communication interface at play – lest every match becomes a nightmarishly unplayable free-for-all session. Hence the squad systems.

There are two command elements at work. Individual squads work like small teams in MMOGs. Anyone can start a squad, invite their friends, lock it or make it public. You're given a huge set of tools that means you can coordinate your actions and issue small-scale commands (cover that door or take that tank and so on).

TOYS FOR THE BOYS

Then there's the overall command leader. "He has more tools and toys and probably knows more than the average Joe as far as where the enemy is, where the good guys are and so on," Decker explains. "There's only one per side, so it's an interesting and different way of playing *Battlefield*. You get a different view of the map. So it's for those that want that prestige or like more RTS-style games – or are just control freaks."

Commanders can lay down strategies, issue specific goals and objectives and call in all-important air strikes. As a regular soldier you're free to ignore him, but inevitably any side working as a cohesive unit is far more likely to succeed than a side with 50 Rambos running around at will.

So the idea is to provide structure for those that want it without losing the basic pick-up-and-shoot gameplay that the series is famed for? Decker nods: "There are certain rewards you get for following orders, but there are no penalties for not following them. You can
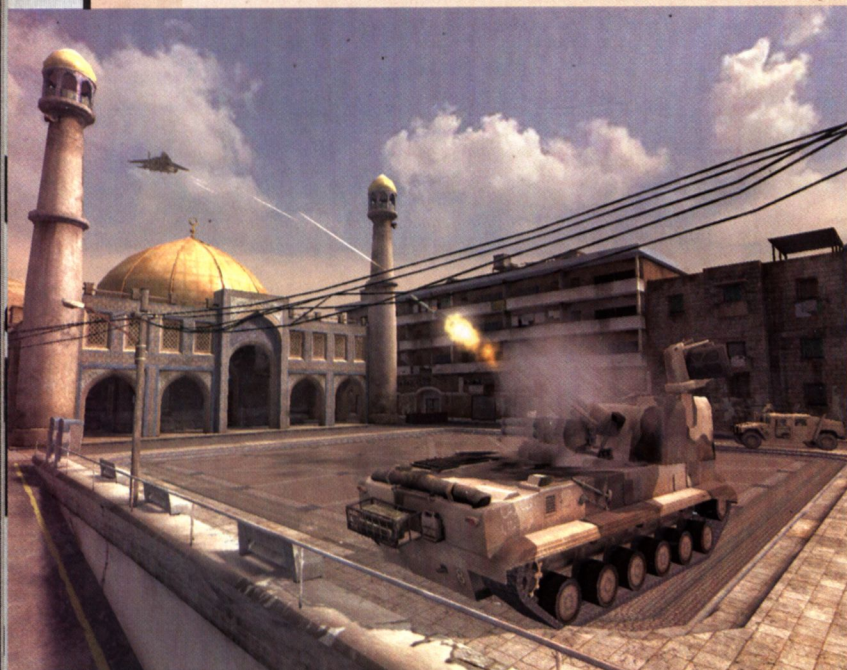
"It's no good sarge. The silly string cannon isn't working."

I knew the parking round here was murder, but this is ridiculous.

play the game the way you want to: if you don't want to be in a squad, you don't have to be."

You may not want to be in a squad, but then you'd really be missing out on half the game. As well as experiencing the sheer joy and love that comes from supporting your fellow man, working together is also the best way to stay alive long enough to unlock the game's reward structure.

"One thing we always wanted to do that we weren't able to previously was have more permanency," Decker confirms. "You play a game right now, you play for 30 minutes and then all the rewards disappear." Consequently, *Battlefield 2* now has a permanent online stats system for every player that logs in.

However, in-game it's about more than just numbers. "We thought, 'Why not also reward people for being able to play for long periods'?" says Decker. "When you get to a certain rank, why not give them something to go with the title besides just the bragging rights?"

Ranking is essentially a way of comparing your in-game success levels with your fellow combatants. A way of showing how much better you are than the rest of us mere mortals. But with the rank come rewards in the shape of different weapons and equipment. Not better, necessarily – just different.

"We also have some surprise ones in there," Decker grins. "So, just for example, multiple knife kills in one round might unlock a piano wire as a new weapon. There are also ones that are tied to different awards that you may pick up along the way. Not only weapon rewards, but also gameplay ones that give you new abilities to affect the way you can use certain things."

LOUD AND CLEAR

Having a squad-based game automatically means you need a communication system that works well enough to cater for 100 players at a time. The good news is that you won't have to mess around with tricky third-party software just to be able to say, 'Stop shooting at me, I'm on your side', to your American friends. The even better news is that it's been designed in such a way

ARMY OF ONE

Surprisingly, there's a fair number of gamers playing solo in *Battlefield*.

PLAYING WITH YOURSELF? YOU'LL GO BLIND

There's no doubting where Decker sees *BF2's* place in the world: "We're primarily a multiplayer game. We realise that's our sweet spot." However, that doesn't mean the singletons out there are being shafted (a state of affairs they're all too familiar with).

The AI is being given a complete overhaul for the single-player game, with five new programmers and a dedicated producer having been hired especially for the task. "We're pushing hard as we realise we didn't really deliver what we thought was a very satisfying experience on the single-player side before," admits Decker.

With good reason too. "It hasn't been our focus, but in our research we've found a lot of people *do* play single-player, for whatever reason. In our last poll, we had 13,000 respondents – and 25 per cent of them said they play single-player exclusively. We don't want to disappoint them. Plus, we just feel we can do better."

"Dammit, these emergency supplies of baby milk powder *must* get through."

BATTLEFIELD 2'S ELECTRIC SHOCK TREATMENT

Two new classes are playable in *BF2* – the medic and engineer – both of which have been given a greater role in the conflict than in previous games. As Decker admits: "People would play the medic class in *BF1942* primarily to heal themselves – it's way too difficult to heal somebody else. So we wanted to make the medics more interesting."

Medics are armed with defibrillators, capable of both bringing players back to life and sending electric shocks through the bodies of unsuspecting enemies, something that came about by accident. "There was a bug in a prototype version of the game that let you fry people," laughs Decker. "We thought it was great though, so that worked out well. I'm sure we'll have a reward for Most Defibrillator Kills."

with the idea of on-the-fly map scaling, changing the parameters as people joined and left a server. Not the best idea they ever had.

"It was one of the things we tried prototyping originally," confesses Decker. "We got it working and discovered that it was very strange to be playing a game, have more people join and suddenly everything changes. Where the control points are, where the tanks are located and so on. Or, when people leave a game, the death material comes in on you like a big amoeba and you're running in front of it trying to find a safe combat area. It wasn't really intuitive." You heard it here first folks. *Battlefield 2* – no death amoebas.

OUT WITH THE OLD
You've probably guessed by now, but *Battlefield 2* is heavily reliant on the broadband explosion currently taking place. The graphics engine alone is so state-of-the-art, Decker is confident that rival engines such as *Half-Life 2*'s or *Unreal 3.0* won't be so far ahead when they launch. But are the days of 56k modems finally over? "They are for us," he laughs.

> "There are surprises in there. For example, multiple knife kills in one round might unlock a piano wire bonus"
>
> **SEAN DECKER**
> PRODUCER, *BATTLEFIELD 2*

Which is perhaps the one environment *Battlefield 2* is going to have to really fight over. *BF1942* pretty much spearheaded the development of the online shooter genre. But with more piranhas fighting over gamer pie than ever before – *Joint Ops*, for instance, is about to steal a march on the 100-player, multi-vehicle team-based shooter genre well ahead of DICE's schedule – *BF2* has to prove it has enough firepower not just to hold its own, but to redefine the way we play once more. Certainly nothing we've seen so far indicates it's in any way lacking. PCZ

to avoid swamping the channels with players spouting the usual gibberish.

"If you've ever played with voice comms on something like *Counter-Strike*," describes Decker, "you really don't want to listen to everybody – especially in 100-player games. So we're being very strict on channels. If one of the things you love is getting together with your buddies and just talking all the time, then you're probably best off doing it outside of the game with some other VoIP program."

Instead, *Battlefield 2* uses context-sensitive voice commands. If you're a medic, only you hear the calls for medical help. Meanwhile, engineers only hear requests for repairs, and chopper pilots are the only ones plagued by the endless screaming calls from dying soldiers for a pick-up.

CUSTOM COMBAT
Up to 100 players. Yeah, roll that one around for a moment. Even the best level designers in the world would have trouble creating environments that provide enjoyable, focused experiences for both ends of the numerical scale. Luckily, DICE has a plan: variable map sizes. Each has been designed at four scales – 16 players, 32, 64 and the big one – double-oh. Decker provides an example.

"Take the *BF1942* map Market Garden. There's a German base, two bridges, a small town, a church and an American airbase over the hill. A 16-player game would only take place between the bridges and the church.

For the 32-player game, you expand it beyond that to the current size seen in *BF1942*. For 64 players, you make it bigger still and extend the river down further, adding another crossing point. Then for 100 players, you add another airbase and plenty more flak and so on."

Changing the map sizes also means changing where the control points are and which vehicles are available. Every version of a map is then a different experience, rather than just a case of piling more players onto the same map until it bursts.

Originally, the team toyed

In *Chaos League*, you can kill opposition players.

The outcome of a fight depends on a character's stats.

Fielding more monsters means more power, but the opposition run rings around you.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Cyanide
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
WEBSITE
www.chaosleaguegame.com
ETA July 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A unique and amusing fantasy spin on the generic sports simulation
- Detailed management options
- Enormous array of players, abilities and spells
- RTS-style interface allows for precision control of each player

CV CYANIDE

CYANIDE STUDIOS

OK, so it's neither the most prolific nor the most successful developer on the planet, but you have to admire its ability at spotting a niche in the market – no matter how small it may be.

2000 Based in Paris, a group of ex-Ubisoft developers start calling themselves after a suicidal drug.

2001 The team debut with *Cycling Manager*, which becomes the best cycling team management game ever created.

2002 The team produces *Cycling Manager 2* which becomes the best cycling team management game ever created.

2003 *Cycling Manager 3* and *Horse Racing Manager* are the best management games ever created in their fields.

2004 *Pro Rugby Manager*... you get the idea.

Gnome and away...
CHAOS LEAGUE

Richie Shoemaker attends a pre-season friendly that's anything but

IT'S A funny old game. Well, actually, *Chaos League* is a funny old game. Perhaps not in the sense that it'll have you rolling about cackling like a loon, but it is mildly amusing.

Take for instance the typically mundane kick-off – not usually the most exciting part of a team sports event by any stretch of the imagination (unless some bushy earth mother sneaks onto the pitch in her birthday suit), but here the ball begins in the centre of the pitch strapped to a pig, which must be bundled to the ground and mercilessly slaughtered in order for play to begin. And no, there is no vegetarian option – this is a French game.

Much hilarity ensues during the match too, as alongside the regular all-American girl cheerleaders are mercenary female fans that can only be described as trolls. Green of skin, wide of hip and with tits like fried eggs, they happily wave severed heads in the air whenever anyone scores a touchdown.

As you can guess then, *Chaos League* is rather distinct from sports games we've had to sit through in the past. American football is of course the inspiration, but

NFL this most certainly isn't, for while the aim of the game is to force an egg-shaped ball into the opponent's end zone, its rules and ways are considerably less formal.

ENT TO ENT STUFF

Aside from the team sheet, which reads like a What's What of Middle-earth, the main difference between *Chaos League* and every other sports game is that violence and foul play isn't only encouraged, it's absolutely essential. Weapons aren't allowed on the pitch and kicking an opponent who's already down is considered bad form, but these are the only rules you have to adhere to during a typical ten-minute game.

With ten races to choose from prior to kick-off, clearly not all are perfectly suited to brawling – the Elves and Goblins being the

Blood Bowl and Mutant League Football are obvious inspirations.

The Orc equivalent of David Beckham, with new tattoo.

TOUCH DOWN
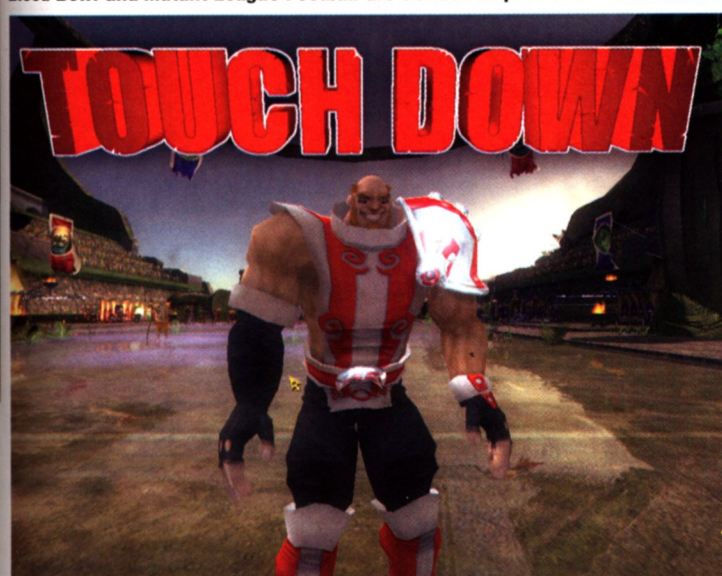
To help you score, you can bribe referees, recruit hooligans and dope players.

obvious weaklings. However, what the rat-faced greenskins lack in brute force they make up for in agility, while the Elves can certainly string a few passes together.

Whichever race you may have a preference for, all are able to field the basic array of player positions, of which there are five; the playmaking quarterback, the brawling linemen, defence-minded linebackers, swift receivers and the more versatile running backs. To beef up the team, each race is also able to recruit a number of monsters selective to their race. The Undead prefer Mummies while the tree-hugging Elves can rely on friendly Ents to help them in battle. Slow in getting about but able to dish out inordinate amounts of punishment, these beasts are the centrepiece of any team and the rules of the game being practically non-existent, you can field as many of each player type your purse will allow – up to the maximum outfield team size of nine, of course.

A GOOD SPELL OF POSSESSION

Winning doesn't always come from strength and brute force, however. Certain races and player positions have access to spells that can be cast during the game – some can temporarily blind opposition players, while others give you the ability to summon creatures to help bolster your

defence for a brief time. If you choose to play the Championship game, each player gains experience and can then spend points on even greater spells and abilities. This increases the potential to wreak havoc on the opposition.

However, the players aren't the only ones able to affect a match. Please the crowd with your scoring or mauling prowess and you may be given access to more spells that enable you to create a fog of war across the pitch, or even plant mines for the ultimate defensive strategy. Conversely, if you stand around in possession for too long, the crowd pelts

your players with rotten vegetables – and if there's an impatient wizard in the stands, he could well unleash something far more lethal too. With fans like these, who need enemies?

JERKINS FOR GOALPOSTS

As well as looking more than a little distinct from other sports titles, Chaos League plays entirely differently as well. Rather than controlling the player nearest the ball as you might expect, all the players are controlled similarly to the units in a real-time strategy game. Initially the mouse-clicking doesn't feel quite as intuitive as when playing a typical football game like Pro Evolution Soccer, but when you consider how much off-the-ball play is made, as well

as the vast array of abilities and spells that have to be called into play, an RTS interface makes a lot of sense. The downside is that the game is tricky to get to grips with and the interface is far from simple, but you can at least be sure that very few games will play out

identically to the last, so varied are the teams and their abilities.

With the added benefit of a timed turn-based mode, exhibition matches, a full set of four leagues to play through with a decent spread of management options, plus some intriguing multiplayer options where you can have three people in control of each team, Chaos League certainly has plenty of features to look forward to. The only aspect of the game that could do with some last-minute work is the presentation, with text that is hard to make out and graphics that are far from spectacular. But then perhaps we've been influenced for far too long by the flashy dominance of innumerable EA Sports titles. Certainly, Chaos League lacks the graphical polish we might

"If you've an unhealthy sexual appetite for slutty trolls or a carnivorous lust for pre-match bacon, all the better"

otherwise expect, but in terms of originality it's probably the most interesting sporting title we've seen for years. And if you've an unhealthy sexual appetite for slutty trolls or a carnivorous lust for pre-match bacon, all the better. **PCZ**

Why Don't You?...

DABBLE IN THE TRANSFER MARKET

In spite of the overwhelming variety of players available, the Championship side of the game could do with some extra features. For instance, once you pick a race to manage and control, you are limited to a specific type of player you can field – an unfortunate side effect of which is that you cannot buy players from other teams. In fact there are no transfer options at all, so if you are in control of a goblin team and you like the look of your rival's dwarf star player, you can't recruit him to your side no matter how big your finances. Sadly, whilst we think a full transfer market would be an excellent addition to Chaos League, the developers aren't keen to work on all the added permutations that might unbalance the game at such a late stage in the development process.

You can spend experience points on added abilities.

It's *Settlers*, but not as we know it.

There's a much greater emphasis on combat this time around.

"Hello, my name is Julian and this is Sandy..."

Look, no more cutesy graphics.

There's still plenty of micromanagement, but not nearly as much as in *Settlers IV*.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blue Byte
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.thesettlers.com
ETA Q4 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's *The Settlers*, only it's mainstream
- Impressive new 3D graphics engine
- 70 unit types to build
- Massively enhanced combat system from previous *Settlers* games

German warfare...

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

Settle down people, *Martin Korda* has a 3D RTS to tell you about

HOW TIMES change. Three years ago when *Heritage Of Kings'* predecessor *Settlers IV* scuttled into our offices, it was all about complexity, micromanagement and the kind of cutesy graphics that Germans find adorable, but most Brits find nauseating. Well, forget all that, because the fifth instalment in this community building RTS series has taken a major leap away from its predecessors' ethics and opted instead for a far more conventional RTS approach.

LOOKING GOOD

Right, let's start with the graphics, which are unrecognisable from previous *Settlers* games. Good start then. Unless you're called Schultz, in which case you're probably crying salty tears right now. Pull yourself together man.

Powered by Criterion's impressive RenderWare technology, a freeform, fully zoomable camera allows you to get up close and personal with your 3D units, revealing a far more serious and lifelike level of detail.

While we were taking the game for a spin, we were impressed to note an excellent new weather system, which saw a nearby lake freeze over in the winter, allowing our enemies to cross over and attack our village. Ambient flora and fauna, static building animations and some impressive fire effects that spread and crackled like a pyromaniac's wet dream, also greatly added to the game's new sense of realism.

Fear not though, *Settlers* fans, you haven't been completely forgotten, because community building and exploration are still integral parts of the game. Communities will be interdependent, which, thanks to my GCSE Economics teacher Mr Walsh – you were right sir, GCSE Economics wasn't a *complete* waste of time – means that everyone is dependent on everyone else's skills. You'll have to carefully plan which units to build to help your community prosper and conquer the game's 20 levels and seven enemy kingdoms. With over 70 unit types available – each with their own set of unique skills – and the ability to barter goods, there'll still be a fair amount of micromanagement too, but not nearly so much that newbies should feel scared off.

SPOILING FOR A FIGHT

Combat is also receiving a major overhaul, as it was more of an afterthought than a major gameplay element in the *Settlers* series. *Heritage Of Kings* is introducing more units and tactical subtleties than all of the previous games combined – cavalry units make their debut, and you'll now be able to train every soldier into a rabid killing machine. An RPG system will allow you to furbish veteran troops with new abilities and weapons, and you'll even be able to research new battlefield technology.

Going by what we've played, *Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* could well be the first *Settlers* game to break into the mainstream and truly succeed here in the UK. Its more traditional RTS approach might draw many newcomers to its banner, but conversely, could also put off die-hard fans. For now though, it's looking like being a lot of fun, and after the heavy going of previous *Settlers* games, we'll happily settle for that. **PCZ**
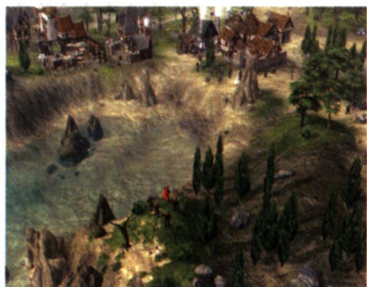
Weather will play a major role during combat.

"I ain't gettin' on no plane!"

There's no quick save – you begin the game with a total of three old-school 'continues'.

REPEATEDLY PRESS ACTION TO CAPTURE
Capturing bosses means mastering beat 'em up mode.

War on terror...
AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED

Jamie Sefton signs up with Uncle Sam to save the world from some very nasty men indeed. Exclusive first hands-on play!

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black Ops
PUBLISHER Play It
WEBSITE
www.americas10mostwanted.com
ETA July 23

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Based on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list
■ Action-packed globe-trotting shooter
■ Beat 'em up mini-games to capture suspects
■ Deathmatches with Bin Laden as player character
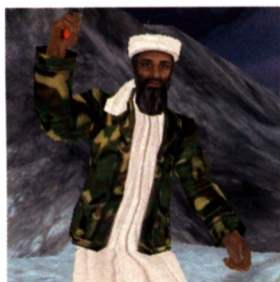
Congratulations, you've won the (Dusty) Bin Laden bonus!

Don't expect any artful AI – simple blasting is the order of the day.

AS WELL AS becoming one of the most bloody and controversial Western policies of recent years, George Bush's war on terror has also given videogames plenty of juicy material to draw upon for subject matter.

Which brings us to *America's 10 Most Wanted*, a new, unashamedly jingoistic shooter that puts you in the combat fatigues of Jake Seaver, a single-minded agent of the Criminal Interdiction & Fugitive Recovery organisation (CIFR). Jake has to track down and capture some of the world's most notorious terrorists and criminal masterminds such as violent US bank robber Casey Webber and ex-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein (er, didn't we already drag him out of a hole in the ground last Christmas? – Ed).

I WANT MY CNN

After you've viewed the disconcerting video images of terrorist acts, flag-strewn memorials and Al-Qaeda promos officially licensed from CNN, you're thrown into the game, which begins with a frantic training mission on the mountainous Afghanistan/ Pakistan border. Seaver has crash-landed in enemy territory and to survive must waste dozens of Osama Bin Laden's hired goons with progressively more violent weaponry.

Although each of your weapons only has one fire mode, all have a decent kick, with the double-barrelled shotgun and a particularly brutal flame-thrower proving the most useful when you're surrounded by unfriendly types armed with rocket-powered grenade launchers. Players are awarded money for each kill, with extra rewards for head-shots, destroying ammo dumps and other hidden bonuses, all to the soundtrack of popular urban beat combo So Solid Crew.

The action in *America's 10 Most Wanted* mainly consists of straightforward run-and-gun blasting – don't expect sophisticated AI, state-of-the-art ragdoll physics, vehicles and huge open environments. If *Far Cry* is a university professor of Advanced Quantum String Theory, the AI in *ATMW* would struggle to pass its GCSEs.

But that's not to say the game isn't worthy of attention – it's actually quite chucklesome, with various OTT motion-captured death animations, tongue-in-cheek voice-overs (Seaver's occasional 'Jesus!' outburst is very special) and furious firefights.

FIGHT!

However, what makes *ATMW* unique as a first-person shooter is the beat 'em up mini-games that occur when you encounter each of the 11 (yep, 11 – Bin Laden is a bonus) end-of-level bosses. When you press the action button near a Most Wanted character, you then move from mouse/keyboard control to the number pad, where you can tap the keys to execute different punches, kicks and combos to hopefully bring down your foe and eventually 'cuff them and hand them over to the US authorities. Poor fellas...

Multiplayer mode consists only of deathmatches, but at least it gives you the opportunity to play everyone's favourite baddies, Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. We played very early code, so are hoping the game's PS2-looking graphics will be improved to the point where we can at least raise the resolution from 640x480. *America's 10 Most Wanted* could well turn out to be an exploitative, ultra-dumb console game, but the Free World will probably love it. **PCZ**
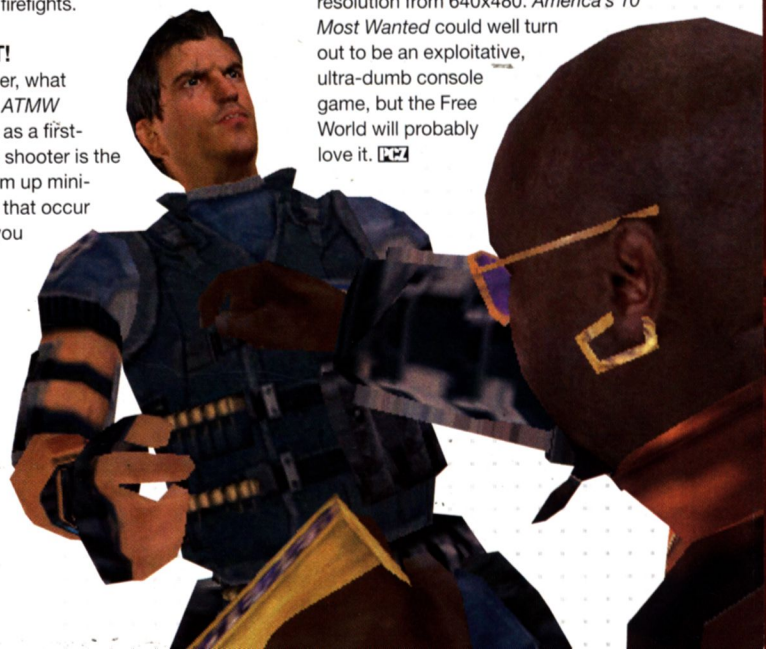
This is what is known in the trade as a 'flag'. Capture it and you're a hero. Women will fall at your feet. Nerds will type 11111. The day will be yours.

Ski funday...

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Will Porter straps himself into a jetpack and blasts into the cosmos...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.tribesvengeance.com
ETA October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Online fave set for the mainstream
- Strongly scripted narrative for solo campaign
- Superbly designed CTF arenas for skiing and blasting
- Strong pedigree in the Irrational Games back catalogue
- Great fun ensured by addition of Grappler

PHYSICS IS officially flavour of the month, and indeed year: every shooter worth its salt is now aware of the terminal velocity of flailing bodies and that 'v' always equals 'u+at' in the processes of their rolling death machines. But in *Tribes*, physics isn't some frivolous luxury: it's a way of life. The chosen mode of transport is a jetpack and the primary fuel is gravity – while expertise in skiing, skidding and sliding is what separates a disc-munching newbie from the warmongering tribal elite. And, even though I suspected it anyway, my time viewing the latest code of *Tribes: Vengeance* showed me that it's going to be pretty damn slick.

To play, you're rammed into the tightly-fitting armour of Julia, a warrior princess trained in the ways of disc burning and physics-manipulation. The first level has you manning the side-cannon of an assault ship as it drifts over snowy mountains and icy tundra, blowing merry hell out of the yellow rocketeers manning the anti-aircraft guns below. After this, a mop-up operation is deemed necessary, so you and an AI accomplice set out over the snowy wastes to take out the remaining enemy troops. At this point, however, the game abruptly ended when a lacklustre boost had Ms Julia tumbling into a vast metal dome, only to get several rockets to the chest from a startled sentry.

So far so good, simply because it sets itself apart from the normal FPS template. True, the graphics are big, bright and colourful rather than glitzy and heavily-detailed – but *Vengeance* is a game that's going to sell because of its heritage and the way it plays, rather than on gritty realism.

PEOPLE AVIARY

It also asks a question that no previous shooter could – what would environments look like if their occupants could fly? Stairs aren't needed, ceilings are hundreds of metres high, ladders (eternal FPS clunker) are suddenly out of the equation and there isn't anything fragile lying around that could be crushed by a heavily-armoured rookie tumbling out of the sky.

The huge conical structures, connecting tubes and vast open spaces of the second solo level I saw are relatively simple, but also encourage an entirely different style of play from the stealth and horizontal-blasting of other shooters. Packed with assailants of all character classes, deployable gun placements and armouries as well as dormitories hanging high in the air, the solo angle is a clever way of introducing the mass-market FPS-enthusiast to the way that *Tribes* plays online (albeit with extra strafing). It certainly looks like the developer is on the right track.

However, Irrational is treading a fine line on the multiplayer. Streamlining controls and (in the build we saw at least)

HOOK, LINE AND GRAPPLER

ANOTHER REASON FOR *TRIBES: VENGEANCE* BEING THE MOST MANOEUVRABLE SHOOTER AROUND

First and foremost in the catalogue of new tribal technology is the Grappling hook. Now, back in the day, I can remember having oodles of fun with a length of rope and a metal hook in *Quake* mods – and *Vengeance* looks set to repeat the same trick. Being chased through the air by a rocket-toting enemy? Simply nip past a hanging platform, attach yourself with your handy metal rope and watch the momentum tug you round in a neat circle – right behind your soon-to-be-dead pursuer. With the added ability for you and your tribe-mates to attach yourselves to vehicles and move in convoys around the map, the grappler is bound to add some interesting dynamics to the highly tactical nature of *Tribes* warfare – and it should nestle quite nicely between the variety of other armaments on offer.

"After seeing the first multiplayer map boot up – a giant arena with extreme tribal combat – I swore with delight"

Introducing the new Turbo-Tractor Xtreme! Plough, reap and sow like never before!

The new Wembley?

Center Parcs circa 2150.

CV

IRRATIONAL GAMES

The Aussie branch of Irrational is responsible for *Tribes: Vengeance*, the company who brought us the sublime *System Shock 2*.

1997 Ken Levine co-founds Irrational Games. The staff at the company include many of the programmers who created *Thief: The Dark Project* at Looking Glass Studios.

1999 *System Shock 2* is released to much rejoicing. And shitting of pants.

2003 *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* is announced, an intriguing nazi-bashing follow up to 2002's well-received tactical superhero romp.

providing more rigid roles for the heavy, medium and light character classes may well make the game more saleable, but also might make the hardcore (some of whom are still sniffy about the changes made in *Tribes 2* after all) a little miffed. In my opinion though, online play is set to be absolutely ace.

It's true that the push to broaden appeal has made it a lot more like *Unreal Tournament* (it's been built with *Unreal* technology). However, my first reaction on seeing the first multiplayer map booted up, a gigantic arena where tribal combat has become some sort of extreme sport, had me swearing forcibly and loudly in abject delight. Platforms, passages, dips, hollows and a vast space that's set to be filled with 32

hurtling gamers make for the most intriguing multiplayer map I've ever seen: a game of CTF fought in three dimensions, with sound effects of a screaming crowd, a multitude of deployable artillery and *Tribes'* own patented flight models. When experts get their hands on this game, the motion of their play will become an art form – and even when I waddle in for a blast, it'll be funny as hell.

WE LIKE…

What with a solo narrative that's been sculpted by the brains behind *System Shock 2* (it promises to jump between six characters, different time periods and vastly different settings), you may have realised that I'm firmly in the *Tribes: Vengeance* supporters camp – sitting in a green field and waving an Imperial flag. It's true that it's still early days, but it's really quite refreshing to discover a shooter that won't simply rely on corridors, the undead and cheap fun-house scares for its gameplay.

Zoe Castillo: the loveliest of the three characters you get to play.

Go to sleep...

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Will Porter discovers a long journey that involves neither family arguments nor the Little Chef on the A1(M) northbound

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Funcom
WEBSITE www.dreamfall.com
ETA Q3 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Glorious 3D follow-up to a PC adventuring classic
- It is, honestly, beautiful to see in motion – believe it
- Three worlds to explore and 50 NPCs to meet
- A lead lady that makes us feel dizzy

A reinvention of the genre?

I'VE NEVER truly had feelings for a computer-generated woman, but seeing *Dreamfall*'s heroine Zoe Castillo in motion has done something very weird to me – I'm getting strange urges to make a virtual female cups of cocoa. But this may have something to do with the fact that she's the star of the sequel to 1999's *The Longest Journey*, a game widely seen as a touchstone for adventuring greatness and an example of the emotional heights that games can reach should they create a narrative with believable, deep-running characters.

A THING OF BEAUTY

This time around, the 2D point-and-click approach has been left by the wayside, and the perpetually balanced twin worlds of Stark (a land of science and industry) and Arcadia (a realm of magic and mysticism) are now presented in a glorious 3D action adventure model – and joined by yet another mysterious dimension known only as 'The Winter'. What's more, even in this age of exponentially increasing graphical know-how, the game is truly beautiful. It has visuals so deep you could drown in them.

The extra dimension has been added in a way quite akin to the disposal of the points and clicks from *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*, with action set pieces breaking up the adventuring. From what we've seen, however, *Dreamfall* has made the shift more organically, with a less rigid gameplay style and, if the player so chooses, the opportunity to engage in a spot of fisticuffs if it's needed. We've also been promised there won't be any crate shifting.

Two-thirds of the game will see you directing the beautiful brunette fortunes of the aforementioned Ms Zoe Castillo, a bubbly college dropout from Casablanca who gets embroiled in a conspiracy that covers

Like a pre-op Lara...
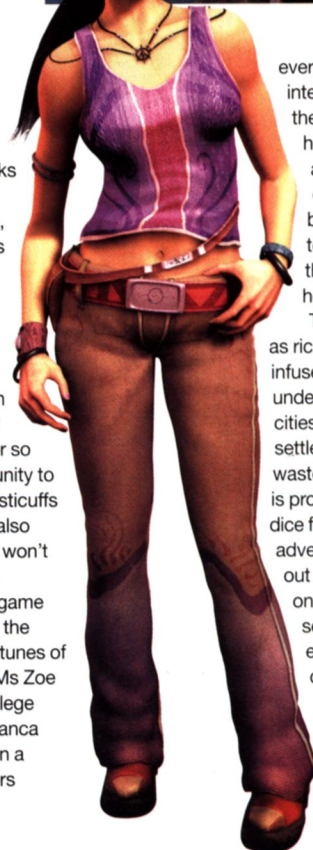
everything from dreams to static interference. You'll also get in the shoes of April Ryan, the heroine of the original game, and a mysterious fellow called Kian – the blueprint being for these three plotlines to spiral around each other throughout the tale's 15 hours' worth of gameplay.

Taking you through worlds as rich and diverse as technology-infused mega-corporations, underground cities, floating cities, forests, frozen northern settlements and the twilight wastes of 'The Winter', *Dreamfall* is probably the last throw of the dice for the reinvention of old-style adventuring. We're fast running out of games to pin our hopes on, but going from what we've seen so far (and Funcom's earlier work), it's unlikely to disappoint. It's going to be a long wait though – we won't be able to put lovely Zoe through her dainty paces till late next year. **PCZ**

SONY

Brilliant display? Mission accomplished.

When releasing the award-winning HS Series, we knew we needed to give you something outstanding to appreciate its performance. (Well, it does have an ultra bright screen and a super fast graphics processor for consistently high quality images).

That's why we've bundled the superb 'Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell® Pandora Tomorrow' game with it. Looks like Sam Fisher has another piece of hardware he'll appreciate.

UBISOFT

iF design award winner **2004**

displays *by* sony

You make it a Sony

Resources are gained by taking strategic points on the map.

Morning glory...

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
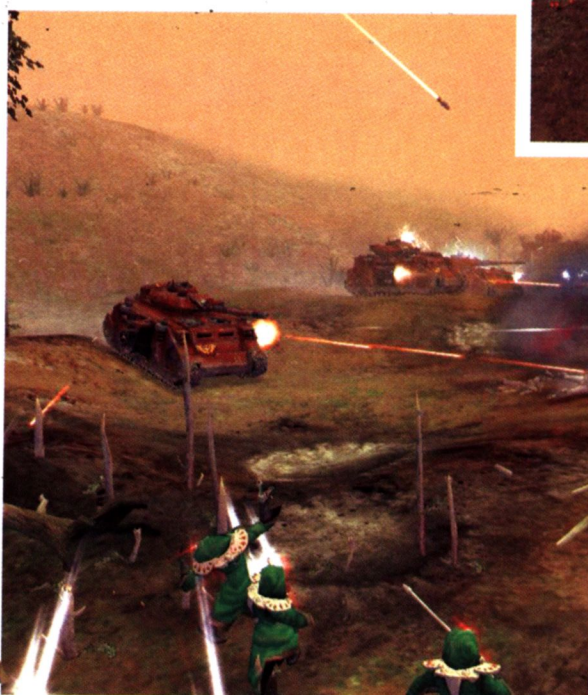
- 3D RTS set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe
- Huge number of cool units and vehicles
- Fantastic graphics and animation
- Single and multiplayer modes

**LAST PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
142**

Jamie Sefton overcomes his fear of the Genestealer to venture boldly into Relic's tabletop-inspired RTS epic

"Life? Don't talk to me about life..."

YIKES! The more we see of fantasy RTS *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War*, the more we're impressed by its incessant gory battles packed with hundreds of incredibly detailed, hilariously animated units gouging chunks out of each other.

After our preview in issue 142, *Impossible Creatures* developer Relic dropped by to show us the latest code of its new Games Workshop-inspired 3D strategy romp in action, including some never-seen-before units, vehicles and war machines from each of the four main races of Space Marines, Orks, Chaos Marines and Eldar Warriors.

WARHAMMER FRONTLINE

Dawn Of War is entirely a frontline, battlefield experience – you won't have any tiresome empire-building as you're basically creating a field base that will let you throw your military units into a massive battle raging just a few dozen metres away. A single-player campaign, set on the planet of Tartarus from the point of view of the Blood Raven chapter of Space Marines, is available, plus a fully tooled-up multiplayer mode where up to eight players can compete as any of the four species.

Gameplay is essentially squad-based, so if you click on any unit, you'll grab a whole group of infantry or vehicles and instantly see their health and morale stats

– which can be broken if you take sufficiently heavy losses, reducing your team's effectiveness in battle. However, you can improve your troops' firepower by simply clicking on the task bar, allowing you, for example, to quickly upgrade from a Space Marine's standard Bolter rifles to more lethal Flamers, Heavy Bolters and Plasma Rifles in the middle of a firefight.

This is where tactics are really important – squads with lighter weapons can run and fire, whereas those with big guns have to move and set up before firing, which can take a crucial couple of seconds. If you're decimated, you can always reinforce your squads with extra units that instantly spawn on the battlefield, keeping the action thick, fast and very bloody – especially when you employ your Force Commander or equivalent units, which have special powers such as the ability to call in orbital bombardments from space.

BIGGER IS BETTER

As for the vehicles, we witnessed some lethal metal beasts, including Whirlwind and Predator tanks from the Space Marines, Grav tanks armed with mini-nuke-firing weapons from the Eldar, and a terrifying spider-like Chaos Defiler from the evil Chaos Marines.

You'll also have access to hulking rusty delights such as

Space Marine Dreadnoughts armed with half-a-dozen meaty weapons, Eldar Wraith Lords – basically huge walking robots – and the home-made Ork Big Mech.

Best of all, Relic confirmed that each species *will* now have the equivalent of the Titans from *Age Of Mythology*, such as the Blood Thirster, a frightening axe-wielding mega-demon summoned by the Chaos Marines' Chaos Lord. Yep, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* could turn out to be so good, you may have to pack up your tabletop figures and let them gather dust in the loft forever. **PCZ**

Interaction between the warring units is a cut above other RTS titles.

Remember kids: mirror, signal, manoeuvre...

This is the modding world...

JUICED

Steve Hill joins the boy racers in the fast lane

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Juice Games
PUBLISHER Acclaim
WEBSITE www.juicedthegame.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Hi-octane street racing
- Unlimited modding options
- Extensive career mode
- Online action

THUS FAR, my experience of the modding phenomenon is largely based on three incidents. First, while on a gruelling trip back to London after watching Chester City beat Accrington Stanley away (a proper hobby), we pulled into a faceless

CV

JUICE GAMES

Juice Games is made up of talented ex-Rage Software and DID employees, who built a reputation for producing realistic, cutting-edge 3D military flight sims on the Amiga, Atari ST and PC, beginning with *TFX* in 1993.

1998 It offended many people with the awful name, but *Wargasm* was a tremendously popular action-strategy game.

2001 *Eurofighter Typhoon* was Rage's attempt to resurrect the team's fighter series. Recently re-released for a fiver, it garnered an 80% score in issue 134.

2003 *Lamborghini.* See the main text for the sorry tale of this promising racer.

Midlands service station hoping to secure a snack from Julie's Pantry. In an unprecedented move, the service station was closed and about 200 cars were attempting to leave the car park simultaneously. With confusion reigning supreme, it suddenly became apparent that every car was sporting spoilers, decals and neons, and was piloted by a callow 'yoot' in a baseball cap, all of whom mocked our undressed vehicle as they left us for dead on the M6. Wankers.

TAKE IT TO THE MAX

Second, I was recently on a press trip with a bloke from *Max Power* magazine who had a copy of the latest issue. Flicking through the mag, it revealed the hitherto unknown pastime of cruises, whereby like-minded tamperers meet up in their modded monsters, smoke some cheap weed and watch girls expose their breasts. Said girls were interviewed by the magazine concerning their sexual preferences, none of which we can actually even talk about in *PC ZONE*, let alone print. It's a different world.

Finally – and most relevantly – I've been playing the excellent *Need For Speed: Underground*, EA's multi-million-selling modding extravaganza, and thus far the definitive take on the scene.

Drive time in Angel City: go on, put your foot down.

This 'Scooby' would be better with an A'PEXi titanium exhaust – according to Suzy.

This is a situation that the *Juiced* team is hoping to change, and they'll be setting about EA with gusto: this time it's personal. How so? Well, about half the development team of *Juiced* used to work at Rage and were putting the finishing touches to the highly promising *Lamborghini*, a game that had already received high praise from the press and looked a guaranteed winner. That was until EA snapped up the *Lamborghini* licence for use in *Need For Speed*, the corporate behemoth crushing the Rage game like a grape, never to see the light of day.

FEEL THE SQUEEZE

Despite that kick in the teeth, the surviving members of the *Lamborghini* team have regrouped and started from scratch with *Juiced*, a direct competitor

to *NFSU* and one that would appear to be more than capable of going head-to-head with it. It's fair to say that a lot of similar ground is covered, and tweakers will love it, with Acclaim stating that you can modify and personalise your car with 7.2-trillion combinations.

Like *NFSU*, the action in *Juiced* is set to be city-based, specifically Angel City, which is split into eight distinct districts. Each is home to a particular 'crew' – such as The Wild Cats or Urban Maulerz – and it's this aspect that makes up the core of the career mode. As boss of your own crew, you must earn the respect of your counterparts by impressing them at various meets.

There are four basic disciplines: your standard Race, Sprint (replete with compulsory manual gears á la *NFSU*), Showoff, whereby you pull tricks for points, and Solo, which simply involves setting the quickest time. The career is a

non-linear affair, enabling you to select events that suit your particular skill or car – and if you win money, you can spend it on improving your ride. Furthermore, you can even bet on yourself, or – if you're not racing – an opponent. And with the Pink Slips option, you can race for your opponent's car.

DAMAGED

One of the areas where *Juiced* looks to better *NFSU* is in the damage model, in so much that it has one. As lead designer Richard Badger says: "All gamers know it's very rare for car manufacturers to allow their vehicles to be trashed in racing games, so we feel this is one of the great reasons that will make *Juiced* something special." It's also more than merely cosmetic, having a noticeable effect on the handling.

From what we've seen, *Juiced* is shaping up to be something of a boy

> ## "Imagine making your car the most powerful beast out there – and then testing your skills online"
>
> **RICHARD BADGER**
> LEAD DESIGNER, *JUICED*

racer's wet dream. As Richard explains: "It's a fully licensed game, with car models and parts that are synonymous with the modding scene, so we're hoping the modding fans will really be up for it. We're also working closely with the scene via magazines and by going to shows so they get to see what the game is about and give us feedback. *Juiced* is the most authentic game to embrace the street racing culture."

As for the online options, Richard claims: "Online is possibly its most exciting part. Imagine being able to put the hours into the game, build your crew and make your car the most powerful beast out there – then you decide to test your skills online. You race for pink slips against Petr from Moscow. Ten minutes later your respect is in tatters and you've just lost your hotrod. However, race well and you leave Ivan crying into his beef stroganoff." So that's what they mean by 'juiced'. PCZ

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

TURN A STREET CAR INTO AN ELITE CAR

While the career mode involves gradually altering your car(s) with the addition of mods that become unlocked as the game progresses, there is a quicker option. In the arcade mode, simply select a car, press a button and it becomes automatically modded. If you don't like it, keep pressing until it fits the bill. Not sure about those orange neons mind…

Take a perfectly decent car...

...and turn it into a hideous eyesore.

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

SOME LIKE IT HOT

■ **ASSOCIATE EDITOR** Anthony Holden

▲ There's two things that let us know that summer has arrived. One is that our London office, bereft of such simple conveniences as air conditioning or exotic girls waving banana fronds, becomes a vile sweatbox of grunting men in too few clothes and mean disposition. The other equally disturbing sign is that games publishers narrow the usual flood of new games to the merest trickle, convinced that people don't buy games when it's hot.

This seems like a peculiar conclusion to have reached (though presumably it's borne out by market research conducted by stoned students), as I find there's nothing better than drawing the blinds and playing interactive death games when it's hot. Maybe that's just me.

Certainly, it gives us all a chance to catch up on the last few months' worth of essential PC gaming – the likes of *TOCA* and *Ground Control II* – though it does leave things a bit lean here at the reviews desk.

Luckily, while we may be lacking in quantity, we more than make up for it in quality. Leading the section, we've got the world's first (ever!) review of Codemasters' ace new action/RTS, *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* (p50). It's impressed us more than we could've hoped, and had Richie racking his brains over what award to give it. As it happens, despite a lack of multiplayer options (we're willing to give Codemasters the benefit of the doubt in coming through on its free upgrade), it triumphed, receiving our highest honour – a PC ZONE Classic award. It's one of the year's best games to date and shouldn't be missed – no matter what the temperature.

The other jewel of summer is *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (or as we like to call it, *Thief 3*). It's the game I've been playing religiously this month, and our in-depth analysis starts on page 58.

There's some other rubbish in there too, but that lot should be more than enough to keep you off the beach for a month…

▼

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II 50

The most action-packed RTS ever? World's first review starts on page 50.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2004*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).

PC ZONE CLASSIC

Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.

PC ZONE ESSENTIAL

The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?

2. Apart from playing games, what's your favourite thing to do in a heat wave?
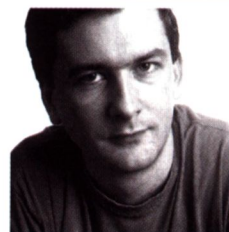
DAVE WOODS
Thief 3

Getting the packed tube into work every sodding morning

JAMIE SEFTON
TOCA Race Driver 2 and *Far Cry*

In Yorkshire, we celebrate the emergence of the sun with a ritual sacrifice of a first-born

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

MASHED **56**

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS **58**

WARLORDS BATTLECRY III **64**

ANTHONY HOLDEN

Thief 3 and *Far Cry*

Cold beer and a barbie
full of sheilas

PAUL PRESLEY

City Of Heroes, Lineage II
and *Battlefield Vietnam*
I can think of nothing finer than
drinking mint juleps from the
porch while surveying ma cotton
crop, sah. Lord-a mercy

WILL PORTER

Thief 3 and *Max Payne 2*
(for the fourth time)
Watching Goths suffer for
their cause

MARTIN KORDA

TOCA Race Driver 2 and
Ground Control II
Rubbing choc ices into my
matted, sweaty man-nipples
(Horrible image – Ed)

STEVE HILL

Mashed and *Pro Evo Soccer 3*

Pitch 'n' putt

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Soldiers, UT2004 and
EVE Online
Usually, I strip down to my
underpants and frolic playfully
with a garden hose

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

■ £34.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Best Way | ETA: July 2 | www.codemasters.co.uk/soldiers

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card

Those WWII games just keep coming, but as *Richie Shoemaker* discovers, there's still plenty to fight for

INPERSPECTIVE

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 88%
Perspective aside, this sequel and *Soldiers* have a lot more in common than you'd think. *H&D2* is the more painstaking option, often verging on the ponderous.

COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE
Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%
Hard as bastard nails (but cheap as chips), this WWII puzzler offers a far more cerebral challenge than *Soldiers* – but for balls-out excitement, *Soldiers* has put a bullet right between its eyes.

CALL OF DUTY
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 94%
The premier WWII shooter offers a surprising level of gritty realism despite the arcade leanings. For in-yer-face WWII action, *Call Of Duty* is without equal.

THE LONGEST Day, *A Bridge Too Far*, *Battle Of The Bulge*, *Where Eagles Dare*... The list of classic Hollywood war films is almost as endless as the roll of World War II games that have borrowed from them. Who can forget *Medal Of Honor's* homage to *Saving Private Ryan*? *Call Of Duty's* grim re-enactment of Stalingrad? Or indeed the *Commandos* series, a run of games that's plagiarised and plundered the entire breadth of war film history a dozen times over (not to mention numerous episodes of *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*)? It's enough to make you question whether there's that much left for *Soldiers* to fight over.

However, it seems that there is, because Best Way, the Ukrainian developer behind the action/strategy game, has done a rather neat job of avoiding all the movie clichés and famous encounters. Instead, it's opted to focus on the seemingly insignificant, or in some cases, the seemingly imaginary.

NOT RAINING MEN

What this means is that if you were hoping to storm the D-Day beaches, fight massive tank battles across the Russian Steppes or enjoy the view as thousands of paratroopers drop from the sky, you're going to be a little disappointed. While *Soldiers'* four campaigns have grand objectives, the means to fulfil them are rather less epic.

You see, as the name suggests, *Soldiers* is about the men on the ground – small groups of rank-and-file infantrymen equipped with modest machinery, tasked with fighting for their country. In the ordinary course of duty, they end up doing quite heroic things.

Not that you realise it at the time, because the game often puts you in the situation where the aim isn't exclusively to blow up some airfield or capture a high-ranking general, but simply to survive. As mundane as that may sound, survival can often be the most heroic feat of all, and, in gameplay terms, one of the most satisfying.

For example, take the German campaign, which sees you controlling a brace of Tiger tanks against the unstoppable Allied advance through Northern France. In both men and machinery you're utterly outnumbered and, compounded by our knowledge of history, the campaign has an air of futility about it.

However, the developer knows that we know the war is lost. So, rather than concoct some whimsical alt-history scenario, or have you charging through the Ardennes as part of Hilter's last gamble for glory, the fight is turned into one for honour and survival, not some notion of ultimate victory. Of course, by rescuing and repairing a stranded tank – one of the objectives toward the end of the German campaign – you naturally end up annihilating vast numbers of enemy armour, but the ➤

If there was a fog of war, you wouldn't get to see this.

You never see the enemy fix their own tanks.

Desc: Train

What would the Fat Controller have to say?

point is that while you're always aiming to destroy your enemy, it's not always necessary or even achievable.

It's the same whether you play as the Americans, British, Russians or Germans – the game pits you against overwhelming odds throughout. As a result, Soldiers has much more of an action feel than the traditional real-time strategy it might appear to be – it's a kind of Hidden & Dangerous viewed from on high, or even a latter day Cannon Fodder. What's more, with the detachment you naturally encounter by playing a game from such a distance, you might assume that Soldiers lacks a degree of intensity – but that's far from the case.

What makes Soldiers such a powerfully intense game is the grand scale of the destruction and the high level of interactivity with the game environment. You

"What makes Soldiers so powerful is the grand scale of destruction and interactivity"

see, absolutely nothing in the game is permanent, save for the ground itself. Tanks plough through houses, explosions tear down trees and telegraph poles and fire spreads across fields, leaving scorched earth and desolation in its wake. I could go on for pages raving about the grass that parts when soldiers run through it, or the tremendous blasts that leave tanks stranded with tracks peeling away, or the final explosions that throw turrets and wheels across the map. However, until you see it in action, it's hard to visualise the true scale of carnage on offer. It's bloody marvellous, though.

Then there are the seemingly insignificant details other developers often overlook. For example, in most strategy games, when you order your troops to board a transport, they approach it and magically disappear inside. I hate that.

Here, each man huddles around the entrance and one by one climb aboard. In the heat of a battle, this lends the game real tension, as with each passing millisecond waiting for your troops to board or alight, there's an opportunity for the enemy to fire on them.

You might need the fuel in that tank for your own.

Tanks for the memories. Ahem.

Fire spreads. Quickly.

Cue 'Allo 'Allo theme tune.

Well, what else are you supposed to do with a rocket launcher?

Nice day for it.

LET SLIP THE FOG OF WAR

One curious difference between *Soldiers* and your more typical RTS is that it doesn't feature fog of war. From the start of any mission, you can zip the camera off to scout the enemy positions, or if you're lazy you can simply bring up the in-game map and make a note of anything red.

I'm not entirely convinced the developer has done the right thing with this decision. For a while it certainly levels the odds, but it does feel as if you're being made to cheat. Perhaps if a small radar with a limited range had been used it wouldn't be quite as bad, or a limit on the movement of the camera as in the *Total War* games. As it is, in terms of strategy it does make the game less of a challenge once you've sussed out the way the AI works – which is a shame.

There are other details too, like the way soldiers lose their helmets, or visibly duck behind a wall when fired upon – making covering fire a crucial tactic (at last!). Even encumbrance is an issue: equip a soldier with too many weapons and he runs out of breath before breaking cover. Heavy anti-tank mines, fuel cans and tool kits are so cumbersome that troops can barely walk with them.

As such, even if there is a lull in the action, and you finally have an opportunity to lay a few mines, refuel or repair your vehicles, the overriding sense of tension is still there as those enemy tanks crawl ever closer. It's simply impossible to tire of all these details, and it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that *Soldiers* offers an interactive experience like no other game available, irrespective of genre or setting.

COOL CONTROL

However, as spectacular and detailed as the graphics are, it's the control system that really marks the game out against the scores of other WWII-themed titles. Being a real-time strategy game at its core, the regular control system (dubbed 'Team Mode') works in familiar fashion: select a unit or group of units and click where you want them to go or what to attack on the way. There's no resource management, no build options or research trees, but what you have is an incredibly powerful context-sensitive interface that enables you to position and command your troops to a far greater degree of usefulness than in other games.

For instance, select one of your soldiers and move the cursor over one of the crumbling dry stone walls that cut across the vast maps and you're presented with the option to leap over, squat behind it for maximum cover or approach it to sneak a peek at the enemy. Click on the long grass and you can take cover in it, or if you have some matches to hand, set it ablaze. Hover the mouse over a tank and you can either climb in, siphon off the fuel, repair, re-arm, refuel or raid it for guns or ammunition. And of course, all the usual strategic stances are available: crouch, crawl, stand, hold fire, fire at will, etc. Plus, if you need to take your time – and you will – you can stop the clock and continue issuing orders or even play in slow motion.

DIRECT ASSAULT

As great as the Team Mode is, it's only half the story in *Soldiers*. As you'll know if you played last month's demo, you can also take charge of your heroes individually. Activated by hitting the default 'End' key, this handy feature means you can control a single unit – either a soldier or a vehicle – using cursor keys to move and the mouse to fire or switch weapon. The cursor changes to hint at your chance of a successful strike and tells you if any obstacles are obscuring your line of fire. It's not a revolution by any means, but Direct Control puts you much more in the thick of the action – if not literally,

WALKTHROUGH →

Your convoy is decimated by the Luftwaffe, but the mission isn't over yet...

1 Your two survivors are a poorly equipped tank crew. If you're going to survive this mission, you need to find some decent weapons.

2 There are some friendly paratroopers under siege in the old monastery – can you break through and help them?

3 Enemy reinforcements pour in... You did remember to pick up that anti-tank rifle, didn't you?

4 A heroic dash for freedom sees the enemy off. Now take their vehicles and cross the river to safety. Huzzah!

JOINT OPERATIONS

MULTIPLAYER *SOLDIERS* BIDS A HASTY RETREAT

At the very last minute, it seems that a decision was made to remove most of the multiplayer options from the game. This was because – we're told – having to complete the necessary work on them would have delayed the release. A strange decision, considering how slow game sales are during the summer months – but then, with the D-Day anniversary still fresh in our minds, perhaps the decision is a sound one.

Sadly then, all that's available under the existing multiplayer options is a four-player co-operative mode. This can be played across all the maps and it works well enough across our office LAN, but the omission of online CTF, 'King Of The Hill' and VIP modes is a bitter pill. Thankfully, we've been assured that a free upgrade will be made available after release that's set to include such options. Although other publishers have made similar claims for their games and failed to deliver, we're inclined to trust Codemasters, as it more than kept its word on *Operation Flashpoint*. The *Soldiers* adventure may only just be beginning.

Finding a full crate of ammo boosts morale.

Hold the bridge at all costs.

I fear for that house.

All those red dots – them's the bad guys.

Soldiers is a bit fiddly at first – it takes a while to figure out how the game works. Tactics, ammunition-selection, refuelling and taking cover all have to be learnt the hard way. The game makes you feel like you've been dropped in at the deep end – and if you rarely make a foray into strategy games, it may take a while to adjust (despite the heavy action quota).

Once your brain's in tune with the gameplay though – goddamn, it's great. I found it a lot trickier than Richie (he's more of a natural commander), but I still found its tank battles and miniature heroism immensely satisfying. A lot of the time I survived a lot more by luck (and save-game) than necessarily by judgement, but I still had a great time. As one who normally finds this top-down lark pretty drab, I'm quite amazed by how far *Soldiers* reeled me in.

then certainly by way of suggestion.

Of course, this is not to say that one method is better than the other. The two control methods are suited to different situations and you find yourself migrating between the two constantly as new situations present. With a squad of infantry waiting for a mighty attack, for example, the best thing is to position your troops behind walls, in windows and among bushes. In such situations, the need is more of a tactical one, where you need an overview of the whole battlefield. As such, if you take control of one soldier, you lose sight of what the others are up to. Luckily, they can defend themselves, but by the same token they won't pull back or counter-attack should the need arise.

Conversely, if the need is more focused – say you need to sneak past some guards with just a couple of commandos, or if you have only one tank left – Direct Control is more effective, and certainly more satisfying should your strategy succeed.

That said, the game is not without a few imperfections. There are a few issues with the context-sensitive interface; for example, when commanding a soldier to take cover behind a wall, it's easy to make the mistake of ordering him to jump over it and into a hail of bullets.

Similarly, if you command a tank to take out an infantry position, he'll probably fire a high-explosive round into them when a squirt on the coaxial machine gun would do the job far less expensively.

USE YOUR HEAD

As for the AI, both enemy and ally do a very respectable job. Infantry flock around a stranded tank to finish it off with grenades and charges, though if nothing else is to hand they just pepper it with gunfire, which is perhaps a bit silly since bullets are useless against armour. However, when you have a crew slowly roasting inside a burning wreck and the only way to safety is through a hail of enemy bullets, the strategy doesn't seem quite so inane.

In stealthy missions the AI is just as impressive. Crawl in sight of an enemy patrol and alarms are triggered – armoured cars and troops fan out and hunt you down mercilessly. That said, if you manage to dispatch your pursuers, other troops in obvious hearing range rarely join the fray.

TANKS A BUNCH

But these are minor issues that can easily be overlooked – as can the slightly irksome banter your troops insist on bellowing. The real thing that's going to determine whether you love this game or not is how strategic you like your strategy games.

Despite being an intensely tactical game, with many paths to success and missions that range from tense stealth to all-out tank battles, it does shy away from the broad battlefield strategy of a more traditional RTS. For a start, the fact there's no fog of war (see 'Missed Opportunity', p53) ensures that you're rarely, if ever, surprised by an enemy. Then again, this eagle-eyed reconnaissance does give you an edge against the strong odds in the game.

While *Soldiers* is far from the most realistic or strategic game

we've ever played, its superb attention to detail, spectacular graphics and sheer drama more than make up for any perceived shortcomings. With an emphasis on fun and a keen eye for game design, *Soldiers* is a must-have game, and not just for RTS fans either. Excluding *Medal Of Honor* and *Call Of Duty*, I'd say *Soldiers* is the best WWII game I've played in years – and that's really saying something. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Action-packed and tactical gameplay
✔ Great graphics and physics
✔ Innovative control system
✔ Well-crafted missions
✔ Plenty of replay value
✗ Interface a bit fiddly
✗ Multiplayer modes are missing
✗ No fog of war

90

A spectacular and dramatic strategy game – this has it all

Defeat can be snatched from the jaws of victory all too easily.

Truck Henge was a marvel to behold.

This blinding flare weapon is a pain in the arsenal.

MASHED

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Supersonic |
ETA: June | www.getmashed.net

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, three friends and four gamepads

A racing game that thrives on spite, wrath and hostility? *Anthony Holden* is first to volunteer

LET'S GET one thing straight: *Mashed* eats, sweats and bleeds fun. It has fun-flakes for breakfast and injects laugh-juice straight into its comically throbbing veins. It's pretty much assured to produce fits of laughter in those who play it, and absolutely drips that 'one-more-go' factor that every game secretly aspires to. Indeed, it's one of the most purely playable arcade-style racers to come along in years.

Now, you might be thinking these statements don't exactly gel with the score in the opposite corner, and you'd be right. There are good reasons for this – or rather, one prevailing reason – but we'll get to that shortly. For starters, let's see what's so damn funny in the first place.

MEAN MACHINES
To put it simply, *Mashed* is *Micro Machines* gone nasty. There's the same isometric perspective, the same teeny cars and the same over-the-top track design. It's all at normal scale, so you won't find any races set on billiard tables or bathroom tiles, but the principle is the same. The difference is that it's about 20 times more intense, thanks to a clutch of evil weapons and a ruthless elimination system.

Here's how it works. You've got between two and four cars on the track, and the camera zooms in and out to keep you all visible – but only to a point. Fall behind the leader too much and you get an exclamation point flashing over your head, which means you have about two seconds to catch up or you explode.

Once the second-last car is eliminated, the winner is awarded some points and the race begins anew, picking up wherever the previous race finished.

Further spice is added to the mix with the addition of the so-called Air-Strike system, which enables dead players to exact vengeance by launching guided missiles at the remaining contenders. It's not easy to get a lock, but the beauty is that even your hovering crosshairs can be enough to break a player's nerve and send him sailing over a cliff.

As you can see, *Mashed* is about as simple as a game can get. The reason it's so much fun is because it's a perfectly

Stay on the screen or explode – it's that simple.

You can put off opponents simply by threatening a missile attack.

Multiplayer games with two teams containing two cars are pure, vindictive fun.

WHY CONSOLES WERE INVENTED

A QUICK GUIDE TO WHY YOU SHOULDN'T BOTHER WITH *MASHED*

As we've established, *Mashed* requires four players for optimum enjoyment – and there's no online or LAN options. Let's look at the logistics of getting a decent contest up and running on your PC.

■ First of all, you have to entice three of your mates over to your house/office cubicle to play PC games with you. Likelihood of success: 19 per cent (and that's only if you trick them into coming under a pretext, like, say, your hot female cousin's visiting).

■ Second, you have to lure them to the desk where your PC resides and encourage them to make themselves comfortable when all that's on offer is a single, ergonomically sensible office chair. Likelihood of success: 15 per cent, assuming the ready availability of folding outdoor furniture.

■ Next, you have to produce a number of USB gamepads, ideally four (though you could get by with three plus keyboard), and an equal number of USB slots on your PC. Likelihood of success: 7 per cent (provided you have a USB hub and allow some time to rummage through the attic/garage/rubbish bin).

■ And finally, you have to keep them sitting there long enough to fire up your PC, download the latest graphics driver, install it, reboot, load the game, reset your control keys (x4) and then fight over who gets to be the red car. Overall likelihood of success: 0.0001 per cent.

engineered catalyst for pettiness, spite and malice as you gleefully crash, smash and bomb your way to victory. (That, and the fact that each round only lasts around 20 or 30 seconds, meaning you never have a chance to become genuinely frustrated.)

It also helps that the 13 tracks are well designed and varied, with plenty of well-implemented

Hang on a sec though – surely it can't be that simple. There must be something we've overlooked… Something, something… Ah, of course: it's a console game! It's designed to be played on a couch in front of a TV, and what's more, it's extremely boring in single-player mode. Even with two players *Mashed* is pretty dull. In fact, the

other games before it, this is *Mashed*'s ultimate downfall.

We've included a handy cut-out-and-burn guide to getting a *Mashed* session up and running at home (see 'Why Consoles Were Invented', above), but I think you'll find there's only one conclusion: this game has no business on the PC. Which is a shame, as otherwise it's an enjoyable, cut-throat little racer. **PCZ**

Slipstreaming enemies for extra speed is crucial.

"*Mashed* is a perfectly engineered catalyst for pettiness, spite and malice"

Dick Dastardly-style power-ups. These include oil slicks, flamethrowers, mines and barrel bombs – the only real dud being a ridiculous blinding flare that hampers the person who fired it as much as everyone else.

Inevitably, there are some niggles, foremost being the wildly zooming and tilting camera. It usually does a good job of keeping up with the racers, but all too often it leaves you driving blind, which is especially felt – and especially unjust – when you're way out in front.

A SINGLE PROBLEM

The game is also stupidly unforgiving at times, with a missed turbo-start or slight brush against a wall effectively putting you out of contention. This is particularly irking given the game's light and breezy arcade stylings.

Saying that, most of these complaints are fleeting – the pace of the game is such that you rarely have time to linger on any perceived injustice, and all things considered, *Mashed* is pretty much, well… Great.

game only truly comes into its own when you have a group of three or four rowdy, vindictive mates shoving, shouting abuse and crying in despair when you nudge them off the track. And like it or not, that's never going to happen on a PC. (And before you ask, no, there's no online or LAN-play.) Like *Micro Machines* and countless

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Simple, hilarious fun
✔ Good track design
✘ Serious camera issues
✘ Desperately unsuited to the PC
✘ Impossible to recommend over console versions

65

Great on any other platform

THIEF:
DEADLY SHADOWS

PC ZONE Z ESSENTIAL

■ £34.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | ETA: Out Now | www.thief3.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Everyone's favourite medieval mischief-maker is back. *Will Porter* picks a pocket or two

Keep still. Hold your breath. Stay quiet. I don't think he's seen you yet.

"You can't stay up there forever, taffer!"

BEFORE we get started, a word to the *Thief* faithful – if everyone else can just hang on this shouldn't take two ticks:

third-person mode good, zombie usage sparse. Everyone still with me? Right. Let's get down to business.

Garrett's big new adventure is a success. Not only is it brilliant fun, it's a worthy follow-up to the esteemed *Thief* canon and one that's sure to please fans of the Looking Glass originals. It hasn't been spoiled by console priorities in the way *Deus Ex 2* was, and manages to refine the stealth formula in a number of clever ways. It does, however, have baggage. It's baggage that makes you roll your eyes rather than slam your head into the keyboard, but be warned that this review will have its fair

share of open sighing. Let's keep it sweet for now though, because overall this third trip around the block with the Master Thief is a very enjoyable one, and if you're comfy and settled I'll tell you why.

YOU'RE NICKED
The story picks up with Garrett thoroughly estranged from his previous mentors the Keepers (a Knights Templar/Masonic affair that guides the course of the city) and continuing his burgeoning career in larceny, often plucking treasure from under the noses of the opposing factions of the religiously fervent Hammerites and the organically crazed

Pagans. As the game progresses your thievery leads you back into the cautious arms of the Keepers, who need a few things nicked to help them with a prophecy in which (surprise, surprise) you figure prominently. From the Bible to *Star Wars* to *The Matrix* to *Thief 3*, the old 'chosen one' chestnut doesn't look like cracking just yet.

For those not in the know, the *Thief* template gives you a crumbling old manor/castle/sewer system, a hastily scrawled map and the knowledge that within the said establishment there are some alpha-steals that you need for plot, some precious steals that

you need for finances and some lesser steals that you need because you're a greedy git. There's some sublime level design within these walls, which is in part what makes *Deadly Shadows* such an enjoyable ride, and there's also a fair contingent of suspicious (and rather chatty) guards – that either need avoiding, or (more likely) incapacitating and dumping in a shadowy corner.

And with the help of some above-average AI and Garrett's credible ineptness in a fight, the whole thing works. You don't know true tension until you're pushed up against a crate in the bowels of Pavelock prison with two guards

convinced that they've just heard something odd; and you know even truer tension when one of them mutters "I'm going to check behind yonder crate." The search AI that's on offer after you've been spotted (and the NPCs' habit of telling you exactly what they're thinking) is the meat and gravy of *Deadly Shadows*. If you're making too much noise, are standing in too much light or if you've just stuck an arrow in their best friend's neck without their approval, then chances are you're in trouble.

If a serving girl spots you then she'll run for a guard. If the guard then chases you down a corridor and you clamber up a wall then your pursuer will patiently wait and inform you that you can't stay up there forever – before (perhaps) rushing off to get reinforcements. If you carelessly leave a door open, meanwhile, they may switch to investigation mode, or perhaps just mutter about the residents of the castle always leaving that bloody door open.

OLD GUARD, NEW TRICKS

It's events like these that make the game so much fun – every guard has the potential for a variety of different reactions, and you never quite know how events are going to pan out. It's certainly not

"IN YOUR HE-AD, THEY'RE IN YOUR HE-EY-A-ED"

ZOMBIES MAKE A RETURN, AND THIS TIME THEY'VE BROUGHT FRIENDS
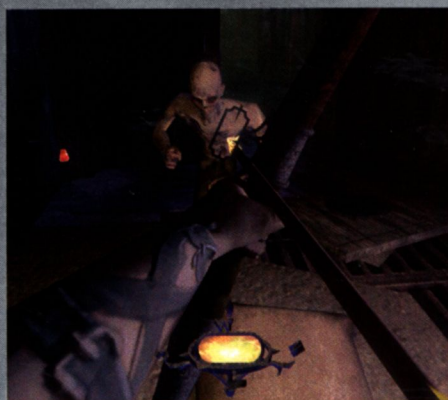
Hey Dead-Head. Take a bite of peach.

Zombies ruined the original *Thief* for me – they just didn't seem to fit within the boundaries of a stealth game. (And *Thief II*'s bizarre clockwork enemies didn't improve matters either.) It's for reasons unknown then, that Ion Storm has resurrected the undead in *Deadly Shadows*, as well as throwing in a bunch of strange Man-Rats and *Stingray*-style Mermen for good measure. Story- and gameplay-wise they're pretty much gratuitous, though they're used sparingly enough for the game not to suffer (too much).

It still gets our goat though. What's the point in sticking in a load of credulity-stretching monsters when you've got such strong characters and narrative anyway? Answers on a postcard, usual address.

perfect, and in many cases the fragility of mind that curses so many in-game characters still applies, but as far as the routine of spotting, investigating and giving chase goes, Garrett's enemies are extremely proficient. Excellent, even.

To aid you in your skulking you have a full complement of medieval gadgets. As well as your standard head-piercing arrows you can arm yourself with water arrows that

Blackjack retains its position as your most subtle and useful drubbing device. In fact, watching your right arm slowly rise as you sneak up behind an unsuspecting member of the constabulary is almost worth the price of entry alone.

Which leads me to my first concern – as a devoted *Thief* fan how could I even contemplate playing the game in the third person? Well, at first I resisted bravely. I tried reader,

"When you're chased, it all turns a bit Benny Hill – minus the jolly music and breasts"

extinguish torches, moss arrows that cover the floor in sound-proofed green stuff and cause bizarre allergic choking reactions in guards, and fire arrows that, unsurprisingly, ignite the poor souls they strike. Gas bombs, mines and holy water do the jobs you'd expect them to, while the noble

I really tried. But then I spectacularly caved – because it actually turns out that the third person works, and works well. For a start the game is built expecting you to use it, and if you're grumpily insisting on doing it the traditional way you'll miss out on features like pushing yourself up against

walls and hackle-raising views of angry Pagans scouring the room for your scrawny hide. The third-person view, however, is a touch clunky. It's great when you're creeping, but as soon as more nimble actions are needed – say balancing on a pipe or taking a difficult jump – you invariably have to flick back to first person. What's more, Garrett is no Sam Fisher when it comes to acrobatics, and you often feel constrained when the supposed super-thief has so many problems climbing through an easy-access window.

SOUNDS SUSPICIOUS
With a raft of familiar sound effects carrying over from the previous games, aural effects are a *Deadly Shadows* speciality. From footsteps tapping over metal grates to the thud of Blackjack on skull, the quality in sound never dips. On one occasion I found myself creeping up a jeweller's staircase when a scripted

In FPS mode, you can see your own two pins. Finally!

sequence saw the shopkeeper come in through the front door, and the simple sound of a door opening and closing behind me had me tapping the quickload key just to hear its eerily authentic slam. Dialogue meanwhile (despite the way it often sounds, see 'Missed Opportunity', right), is impressive simply because of the sheer quantity of lines that have been recorded – you rarely hear a guard say a line you're certain you've heard before. And when you're standing on the stairs of a crumbling manor and a guard shouts out "I see thee on the stairs!" it really gets you by the throat. It's no hard task, I suppose, but no NPC has ever told me exactly where I'm standing before.

When we move on to visuals, however, things aren't

so peachy. Sure, it looks nice, with excellent lighting effects and all, but I know my PC can do better. I also know that it's pretty hard to program an Xbox game that does better, and herein lies the problem. In my view, when you have a cathedral or a castle – anything gothic – you do it grand, majestic and awe-inspiring. Here, they're just done boxy. Everything is crammed up and done at 90 degrees, and quite frankly it isn't good enough. Level design is the area in which *Deadly Shadows* shows its true credentials, but you can't help but feel that it's hampered by the need to pack everything into relatively small, separately loaded zones to cater for console memory. As mentioned, it's nowhere near as bad as the compromises made in *Deus Ex 2*, but you can't help but feel aggrieved nonetheless.

While I'm waving my angry-stick, I'll start up on another gripe. The physics (and the ragdolls, see 'Cryin', Walkin' Talkin'…', left) are integrated into the game with an alarming lack of panache. Where a game like *Far Cry* can seamlessly merge its physics engine with the game environment, *Deadly Shadows*' physics are simply wrong. Should

You're only ever 15m away from a giant six-foot rat in London.

Not big enough, or gothic enough.

CRYIN', WALKIN', TALKIN'... RUBBISH DOLL

RAGDOLLING HITS NEW HEIGHTS OF IDIOCY

I'm not going to write much here; after all, they say pictures speak louder than words. Suffice it to say, the inhabitants of *Deadly Shadows* have iron girders for bones and silly putty for cartilage. Ragdolls: not Ion Storm's strong point.

Eat window sill you taffer!

Wait till rigor mortis sets in...

Garrett's metal eye once again has a zoom function.

Rope **arrows are out, climbing gloves are in.**

Lockpicking is a bit easier than it looks...

Nothing

Nothing

you want to move something you'll have to run into it for a second or so before it wants to shift, and even when it does it'll move as if you're on a medieval moonbase. And how can a cardboard box be weighty enough to stop a heavy cathedral door from opening? (And while we're on the subject, why can't you actually see Garrett holding an object rather than have it appear as an icon on the screen? Bah!)

Despite early claims, physics rarely enter the gameplay, and when they do it's in situations with teetering heavy objects above conveniently placed

Pagans – the likes of which you've seen many times before.

Another feature that doesn't hit the mark is the ability to wander the streets of Garrett's hometown between missions. At first this is great fun: you can raid your local inn, break into your landlord's house and nick all his stuff, offload your stolen goods and stock up on equipment and murder screaming women – all entertaining stuff, but you'll tire of it quickly. There's not enough variety or reward, and later in the game (when all you want to do is walk to your next mission) there's always a cavalcade

of guards, angry Hammerites and pissed-off Pagans who want to chase you through the streets. It all turns a bit Benny Hill (minus the jolly music and breasts) with a so-called man of the shadows brazenly legging it to the next load zone – through which he knows damn sure he won't be followed. The entire presence of this cityscape just smacks of a creative concept that was smothered halfway through development, and the game suffers for it.

AND RELAX

Enough moaning though, as when it comes down to it, I truly enjoyed this game. Its Xbox loyalties may be somewhat misplaced, and it has too many niggles to be considered a true great, but the experience remains compelling. The story is great, the tension is real and if you like copious adrenal activity then you won't go too far wrong.

Occasionally (though admittedly quite infrequently), you're

even faced with a moral decision – do you steal the inheritance of a recently widowed woman who's crying her eyes out while her extended family descend on her belongings like hawks? I didn't, I really couldn't. What would buy me five gas bombs could have brought her a smidge of happiness, so I left her with her loot and a mansion full of unconscious servants instead. Call me a sap, but I think I did the right thing. **PCZ**

The stealth sections are token at best.

"Right, I'm afraid I'm going to have to search you thoroughly for hidden weapons."

"I warned you: no Abba on the jukebox!"

"The idea was to do everything *GTA* did... and more!"

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Luxoflux/LTI Gray Matter | ETA: Out Now |
www.truecrimela.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9.0b compatible 3D card with full T&L support, 3.1GB HD space
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Exploring the huge city is a high point.

He once drove down an LA thoroughfare on the wrong side of the road, so only *Anthony Holden* can review this glossy *GTA* wannabe

THE GRAND *Theft Auto* series has sold more copies than there are people on earth, so it was inevitable that other game companies would try to rip it off sooner or later. To its credit, Activision never played coy with this effort, suggesting right from the word go that *True Crime* was its *GTA*-killer. Needless to say, it's not.

Nothing wrong with trying though, and the concept itself is sound. Very simply, the idea was to do everything *GTA* did... and more! Like what, you ask. Well, like a more coherent plot, a full hand-to-hand combat system, a

huge, accurate real-life city to explore (err, LA), an even more expensive Hollywood voice cast and a guest appearance by Snoop Dog.

And that's all fair enough. The problem (and bear with me on this) is that *True Crime* is American, while the *GTA* games are British. So, where *GTA* has wry, self-referential humour and a knowing sense of cynicism, *True Crime* has cheesy one-liners and token rude bits. Where *GTA* has a gleeful sense of anarchy, *True Crime* punishes you for your extreme acts with a good/bad rating system. Where *GTA* has an uncanny sense of coolness and youth trends, *True Crime* takes the predictable hip-hop/nu metal angle and attempts to buy coolness with high-profile celebrity endorsements.

LOOSE CANNONS

To cite more specific problems, the script, storyline and characters are all hateful. You play as kung-fu cop Nick Kang, a wise-ass troublemaker loosely based on Brandon Lee in *Showdown In Little Tokyo.*

(Which is to say, a complete penis.) As Nick, you have to bust a crime syndicate made up of Triads and Russian Mafia, avenging your dad's death and winning the affections of your frosty female partner in the process. Genius.

As for the gameplay, the missions are split into four basic types – driving, shooting, combat and stealth – which can be respectively described as 'sub-*GTA*', 'workmanlike', 'button-mashing' and 'risible'. The driving sections are by far the best,

mainly because they're modelled on a superb template; the other modes are throwaway, though they do help to keep things brisk and varied.

In between the plot sections, you have the option of cruising the vast LA play area solving crimes, for which you're awarded 'good cop' points, or simply running over pedestrians and shooting things, for which you're awarded 'bad cop' points. The implications of this are surprisingly slight – if you become bad enough you'll be chased by other cops and SWAT teams, but otherwise your rating really only determines which of the three endings you'll get.
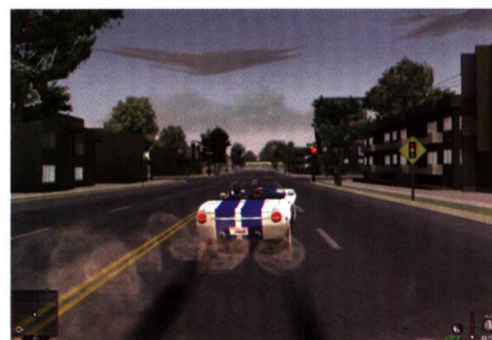
Despite this, the free-form side of the game is fairly enjoyable, though it never matches *Vice City*'s ingenuity of mission types and Easter eggs. The other draw, of course, is that the PC version has been fleshed out with new multiplayer modes such as arena combat and Hot Pursuit car chases, but sadly these can be dismissed with a snort.

Certainly, *True Crime* is not a terrible game; but it is so similar in design to *GTA3* and *Vice City*, and so soulless in comparison, that it's really very hard to recommend. **PCZ**

GTA: VICE CITY
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%
With its combination of humour, violence and endless playability, *Vice City* is one of the greatest games of all time. *True Crime* dreams of being this good.

DEAD TO RIGHTS
Reviewed Issue 139, Score 59%
At its worst, *True Crime* is worryingly reminiscent of this dull B-grade console port. Shooting, fighting and cop-film clichés are the order of the day in both cases.
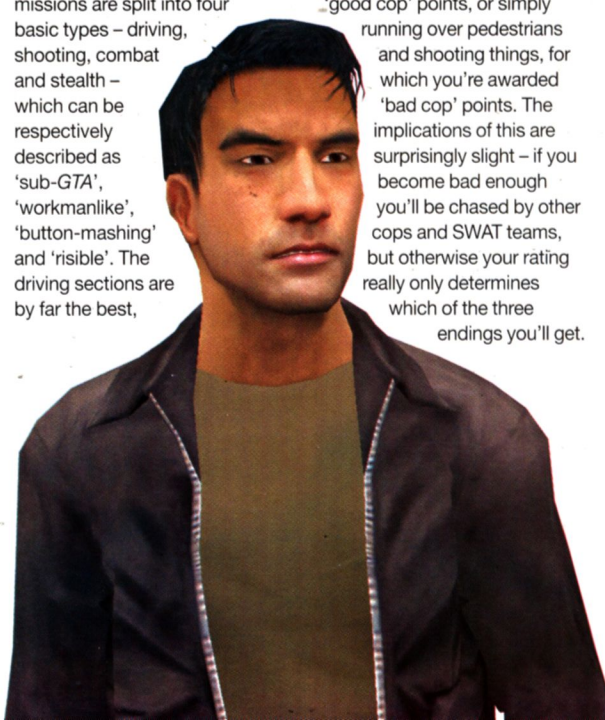
PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Huge, faithful re-creation of LA to explore
✔ A bit like *GTA3*...
✘ ...except not as good
✘ Painfully clichéd script
✘ Rubbish multiplayer
✘ Unsatisfying combat

69

Bland theft auto

WARLORDS BATTLECRY III

■ £29.99 | Pub: Enlight Interactive | Dev: Infinite Interactive |
ETA: June 25 | www.enlight.com/wbc3

REQUIRES PII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800 and 256MB RAM

Martin Korda sheds a tear for this truly ugly yet deep RTS

WHY? Why I ask you? Why has one of the longest-running and most respected strategy series-eses ever still not worked it out? Worked out what you ask? Well, take a look at these screenshots and you'll probably guess. No matter how good a game is, if it looks like a cowpat smeared on a monitor by a Turner Prize winner, it's never going to attract the plaudits it deserves. If you need evidence, just look at any of the recent turn-based *Warlords* games or their real-time *Battlecry* siblings. Sadly, *Battlecry III* is no exception, as it looks identical to its two predecessors.

MUD IN YOUR EYE

Needless to say, looks aren't everything. But they are important, especially when you're forking out a years' savings on a new graphics card. Also, the frenetic nature of an RTS means it's essential to be able to see what's going on during battles. In *Battlecry III*, skirmishes are just a mess. You can forget troop tactics and using the laughable formations – units mostly just bunch up into ugly and indistinguishable clumps of limbs and heads. And don't even get me started on the hideous menus and interface.

But that's where my major criticisms end. Yup, from now on, I'm going to be all glowy and positive, because under *Battlecry III*'s messy visuals and combat lies a great game.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

As with all *Warlords* games, the campaign – which isn't only large but freeform too – is packed with superb RPG elements and revolves around an upgradeable Hero unit. There are a whopping 28 classes and 16 varied races (five of which are new) to choose from, as well as a huge pool of abilities for your Hero to develop (depending on their race and class) and over 100 brilliantly imaginative spells to learn.

With a sphere of influence that proffers bonuses to nearby troops, your Hero can swing the tide of any battle if used effectively. Thankfully, unlike your other troops, he's easy to select, control and monitor. You can further influence battles by choosing which spells your Hero casts and when, while the Retinue function means you can carry your best troops over to the next level, gaining experience as they go.

So, on to the freeform campaign, which tasks you with travelling around the mythical world of Etheria completing either plot-driven missions, fun bonus tasks (such as killing more enemies than your opponents in 30 minutes), or buying items and hiring mercenaries. And while the plot is pretty unspectacular – apparently narrated by a bored Stephen Hawking – the flexible nature of the campaign means you can dip in and out of it at your leisure.

So, despite its appearance, *Battlecry III* ain't half bad after all. In fact, had the combat been more involving and the whole thing not looked like a hatful of arseholes, it'd be knocking on the door of our *PC ZONE* A-List. Let's just hope Infinite Interactive learns its lesson next time – it certainly has the talent, it just doesn't yet have the engine to do this franchise justice. **PCZ**

Don't worry, your eyesight's fine. It really does look this bad.

Of the five new races, the Ssrathi are best, as they have dinosaurs.

A typical battle. Nope, we have no idea what's going on either.

Things are heating up.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Superb RPG elements
✔ Very large campaign
✔ Massive selection of spells, skills, races and units
✘ Ugly as sin
✘ Combat is a mess

70

An ugly duckling with the heart of a swan

CSI: DARK MOTIVES

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: 369 Interactive | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Michael Filby steps over the corpse and heads straight for the coffee and doughnuts

AS FAR as glitzy American cop shows go, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* follows the formula quite nicely. A group of beautiful people who don't look like they'd last five minutes on the beat in real life flutter around crime scenes brandishing shiny forensic gadgets, then talk to two or three people until

everything fits together and points to the guilty party.

This more or less sums up what you have to do in *Dark Motives*, the second game to be spawned from the TV series. Clues picked up from hotspots will point to suspects, who can be interviewed using pre-set questions. If you find enough

evidence to get your Captain interested, he'll give you a warrant to go and turn their gaff over, or bring them in for a proper interrogation and DNA sampling.

The stories, penned by the show's writers, are actually quite absorbing, and make good use of CGI flashbacks of the crime. That said, the gameplay itself is pretty thin, and relies on little more than click-everywhere trial and error. There are also a number of annoying bugs plaguing the game, even after installing the patch that's supposed to fix them.

If you're enough of a fan to forgive its frustrating moments, *Dark Motives'* five cases will give you a few evenings' worth of semi-interactive intrigue, but not much more.

The doc suddenly realised where he'd dropped his torch.

Her name's Sara Sidle. No, really...

The forensics lab could have a field day with that beard.

PCZONE VERDICT 60
A fair cop

GORKY ZERO: BEYOND HONOR

■ £19.99 | Pub: JoWooD/Koch Media | Dev: Metropolis Software | ETA: June 25

REQUIRES PIII 400, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Poland's answer to *Metal Gear*? Steve O'Hagan urges them to keep trying

IN A welcome change from the CIA/Navy SEAL norm, the elite secret agent you play in *Gorky Zero* is an operative of the European Union. His mission is to infiltrate a sect in Ukraine that's brainwashing folk into becoming soulless automatons.

The game (a prequel of sorts to the well-remembered strategy/RPG *Odium*) plays like a low-budget cross between *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*, with both isometric and third-person perspectives featuring. The usual stealth principles apply – hiding bodies, walking quietly, staying in the shadows – so it doesn't take long to feel at home. Slicker features, such as being able to make silent kills with any weapon if the conditions are right are also welcome.

Unfortunately *GZ* is a cut-price release, and its bargain basement credentials are evident in a lack of visual polish, poor mission balancing and

dodgy enemy AI. Character animations are clunky, enemies fail to become alarmed by bullets ricocheting next to their heads, and the stealth mechanics are a little hazy.

It's not terrible – it would have been approaching state-of-the-art a few years ago – and if you're gagging for some

passable action then at least you're only paying £20 for it. But if you're after anything near a top-class game, you're sneaking up the wrong tree.

Anyone smell gas?

You can simply blast your way through most levels if you prefer.

Most of the game is played in isometric mode.

PCZONE VERDICT 62
Cheap and cheerful

I-NINJA

■ £9.99 | Pub: ZOO Digital | Dev: Argonaut | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9.0 compatible 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB DirectX 9.0 compatible 3D card and a decent gamepad

Richie Shoemaker cuts himself a bargain as Namco tosses away a winner

Mech-style robot boxing = great.

Super Ninja Ball anyone?

Now Namco, how about *Tales Of Symphonia* on PC?

GAME publishers seem to assume that all we PC players want are shooters and historical strategy games, and if they're set in World War II, so much the better. This may be true for some, but certainly not for all, and yet whenever a console publisher raids its catalogue for a game PC people might like, it always opts for the shooter. That's why we get crap like *Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior* and *Red Faction* and very little of the interesting stuff like *Ninja Gaiden* and *Super Monkey Ball*.

Luckily, *I-Ninja* is an exception. A fairly typical cartoon-style adventure, it puts you in control of a diminutive assassin with Gallagher eyebrows to fight against hordes of henchmen, robotic dogs and other baddies. As well as fast-paced swordplay, you can take control of turrets, throw explosive darts and shurikens, bound between walls, use a chain to swing between ledges and even guide exploding barrels and metal balls around the place. In all honesty there isn't anything blindingly new or innovative here (some sections are strongly reminiscent of *Mystical Ninja* on the N64), but in terms of variety, energy and fun, you definitely won't be left wanting.

If anything, Namco has undersold this one, for not only are the graphics far more vibrant and detailed than the console versions, but the price is almost stupidly low. Excuse, if any were needed, to buy yourself a decent gamepad.

PCZONE VERDICT	79
Simply great fun	

NOSFERATU:
THE WRATH OF MALACHI

■ £19.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Idol FX | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 833, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Reeking of garlic and loaded with holy water, Richie Shoemaker takes care of a short-lived vampire infestation

AMATEUR DIY experts (and daytime TV aficionados) will know how effective a couple of halogen spotlights can be for transforming a drab room into a lush interior. Similarly, you don't always need the latest 3D technology and a budget of millions to create an atmospheric and tense 3D shooter. And while *Nosferatu* has many shortcomings, the resourceful minds responsible for creating it have done just that.

The storyline, which sees you arriving late for your sister's wedding only to discover all the guests imprisoned and their Romanian host lusting for blood, is, of course, ancient. But rather than forcing you to trudge through hours of hopelessly obvious narrative, the game gives you an immediate aim: to rescue your friends and family in two hours. That's right, just two hours.

Leading contender for the shortest game ever, *Nosferatu* does have one hook to drag you back for more: the castle and the grounds are rearranged every time you start a new game. This means rooms are naturally homogenous and bland, but the atmosphere, fostered by some truly gripping music, ensures the action is loaded with tension.

Taken as a straight-up FPS, *Nosferatu* admittedly lacks a certain amount of finesse. Random enemy spawns are always frustrating and the AI, animation and general look of the game is simplistic at best. But while the action is somewhat prosaic, the dark and menacing backdrop does go some way to making amends. However, seeing as it only takes a few hours to exhaust, *Nosferatu* is still a difficult game to recommend.

"Hey blood, gimme some skin!"

PCZONE VERDICT	67
Classic horror, average action	

NHL EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER

■ £29.99 | Pub: SEGA | Dev: Sports Interactive | ETA: July 2

REQUIRES PIII 600, 96MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Steve Hill tries his hand at a game of three halves

17. Brett Hull (Red Wings)
Looks like Brett's got his red wings...

Different sport, same problems.

Stephen Hill News: in no good newsagents now.
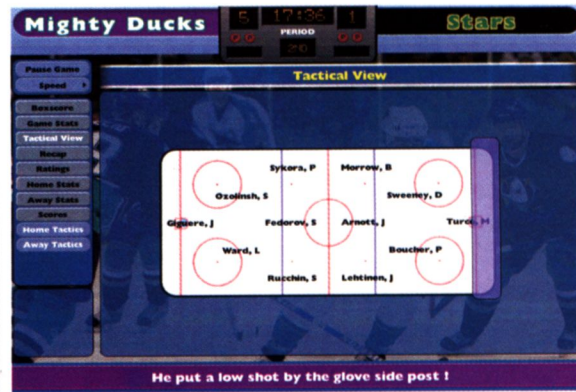
A moving blue bar is as close as you get to action.

WHY BOTHER?

Having dominated the football management genre for over a decade with the peerless *Championship Manager* series, Sports Interactive has now entered the mysterious world of professional ice hockey. Presumably, the reason lies in its plans for world domination.

Whereas in Britain, nobody but the most avid Channel Five viewer gives a flying puck about ice hockey, in North America it's big business. With a baseball game to follow, SI would appear to be vying for the Yankee dollar.

As such, it's drafted in a young Scandinavian programmer, furnished him with the SI tools and a team of lackeys, and locked him in a darkened room for two years. The result is *NHL EHM*, which is undeniably infused with the look and feel of its bigger, football-based brother. At a glance you could easily confuse it with *CM*, were it not for the inclusion of photographs of rugged men with ice hockey hair.

The interface as well as several features have been lifted from *CM*, and as such it's a slick affair. And perhaps it's the familiar feel or the hypnotic flashing text, but it somehow drags you in, whatever your knowledge of the sport. That said, the bulk of the tactical stuff can be delegated to a head coach, although that kind of defeats the object of the game. Ultimately, it's probably the most comprehensive hockey management sim available; but in this country, who really cares?

PCZONE VERDICT 68
Champ Man on ice

STREET LEGAL RACING: REDLINE

■ £9.99 | Pub: Activision Value | Dev: Invictus | ETA: Out Now

I THINK I can safely say, we all have fond memories of *Midtown Madness*. But as much as we enjoyed zipping through the crosstown congestion, pulling one too many red lights and avoiding the cops, it did miss one vital ingredient – a *Gran Turismo*-style career mode.

SLRR aims to plug that gap neatly, and coming from the team behind fondly remembered online racer *1nsane*, we did have high hopes… And then we saw it nestling in the bargain bin next to *Skate Park Tycoon 2004*.

After playing it we're not surprised. It's a shoddy game, full of graphical bugs, requiring a PC a damn sight more powerful than stated on the box, and lacking the under-the-hood accessibility that might otherwise endear it to the arcade racer.

Despite four patches, it's still a write-off.

Which is a shame because with some fine-tuning and a re-spray, this could've been a half-decent title.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT 40

File under: competent but tedious Russian goblin game.

BATTLE MAGES

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Targem Games | ETA: Out Now

FUSING fantasy role-playing and real-time strategy seems something of a minor craze at the moment; no sooner have we forged through *SpellForce* then along comes *Battle Mages*.

As with *SpellForce*, *Battle Mages* casts you as a warrior-wizard who must command troops of infantry and knights against a progression of armies as they pour across the land. The difference here is that, as well as your own character, troops also gain experience that can be carried forward through every battle.

The range of units at your disposal is also more varied – you can recruit horses and crude war machines to the cause. On the negative side, the pace is subdued and the action lacks any real excitement, despite a decent interface. In all, there's little to recommend this over its peers.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT 64

REPLAY

Broke? A stingy bastard? *Anthony Holden* **guides you through the latest budget releases**

BEST BUY

Pro Pinball: Big Race USA: classic ball-flipping action.

Bust-A-Move 3DX: arcade crack.

Rainbow Islands: cute.

EMPIRE ARCADE 2 COLLECTION

■ £14.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | ETA: Late June

FOR A second issue running, Empire has scooped the bargain of the month award with one of its big 'Collection' bundles – anyone would think we were being paid off or something… (Shhhh! –Ed)

As it is, we're just fond of retro games, and there's more than one classic in the mix here. For a start, you have three of Taito's classic arcade puzzlers: *Bubble Bobble*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Bust-A-Move 3DX*. If you're unfamiliar with the series, *Bubble Bobble* is the one where you run around trapping enemies in bubbles, *Rainbow Islands* is the genius sequel that swapped bubbles for rainbows, and *Bust-A-Move 3DX* (aka *Puzzle Bobble 3DX*) is a version of the supremely addictive puzzler where you fire balls up the screen to try and make them pop – since ripped off in everything from *Worms Blast* to the execrable *Snood*.

Also in the pack are two pinball games: *3-D Ultra Pinball Thrillride* and *Pro Pinball: Big Race USA*. The former is a simple, fun re-creation of the sport, though made somewhat redundant by the inclusion of *Big Race USA*, considered by many to be one of the greatest pinball sims of all time.

And if you're a true retro freak, there's also a 1995 re-make of *Space Invaders* to round off the pack.

A fairly impressive half dozen titles then, the only objection being that you can download and play them for nothing using MAME. And you'd be playing the true arcade versions as well, not the slightly ropey arcade-to-console-to-PC conversions that some of these apparently are. Then again, that would be illegal, so we'll recommend this and leave the ethics up to you.

PCZONE VERDICT 71

CREATURES – THE ALBIAN YEARS

■ £12.99 | Pub: Fusion Labs Ltd | ETA: July 16

The extreme cuteness may deter you…

…but there's no denying the appeal.

THE CREATURES titles have always been fascinating. Presaging *The Sims* in many ways, these 'Life Simulations' aren't so much games as extremely engrossing management diversions, which let you breed, nurture and raise a community of furry creatures called Norns. Your little bundles of AI have needs, desires, emotions and lifespans that need attending to (something like supercharged Tamagotchi), all powered by some truly cutting-edge behavioural programming.

This pack comprises the original nurture 'em up as well as the bigger, better sequel, which lets you genetically splice your Norns, among other things. Unfortunately, it doesn't include the third and even more advanced game, which you can now pick up on the Net for under a tenner. As such, the value of this bundle is questionable, but even so there's no denying the engrossing nature of these 'games'.

PCZONE VERDICT 70

LEFTOVERS

▲ What an offensive line-up we have for you this month. I mean, there's usually some pretty rotten stuff in our leftovers bin, but this month is on a whole other plane of awfulness, and you might want to put some turd-proof gloves on before you start rummaging.

At the top of the nauseating pile is *Gods And Generals* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out Now), probably one of the worst first-person shooters ever made. It was released purely to advertise the equally atrocious American Civil War film of the same name, and should be avoided like a religious zealot in a shopping mall – 2 per cent.

Looking almost playable in comparison is *ReVOLUTION* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out Now), an odd Romanian FPS set in a bad corporate future. Graphically it's not disastrous but it is horrendously buggy, boring and poorly designed – 19 per cent.

Somewhat more promising is *Golf Resort Tycoon II* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out Now). It's your typical light-hearted tycoon fare, except with a fairly competent 3D game of golf included. For a fiver it's not all bad – 45 per cent.

Digging deeper into the swill we find *WarCommander* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out Now), a deeply flawed squad-based strategy game with slim pretensions to innovation. With awful pathfinding, idiotic AI and wearisome gameplay, it's really not that enticing, and scores a miserable 29 per cent.

We're up to our armpits in slurry now, and I don't even know if it's worth mentioning the remaining items smeared around this bucket of muck. *Battleship 2*, *Guess Who?* and *Operation* (Sold Out, £4.99 each, Out Now) are all conversions of classic Hasbro board games, given a modern makeover and fleshed out with some rudimentary 3D bits. They're pitched firmly at kids, but seem remarkably pointless nonetheless, especially *Battleship 2*, the original of which can happily be replicated with pen and paper – 18 per cent a piece.

▼ Now – get to the showers and wash that filth off man.
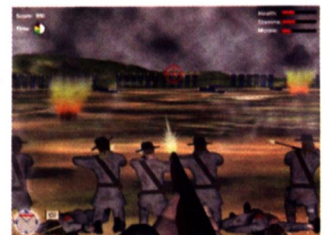
Gods And Generals: atrocious.

Golf Resort Tycoon II: balls.

FEEDBACK

Will Porter retunes his antennae and exposes himself to waves of vitriol and joyful abandon that could damage his fragile little mind
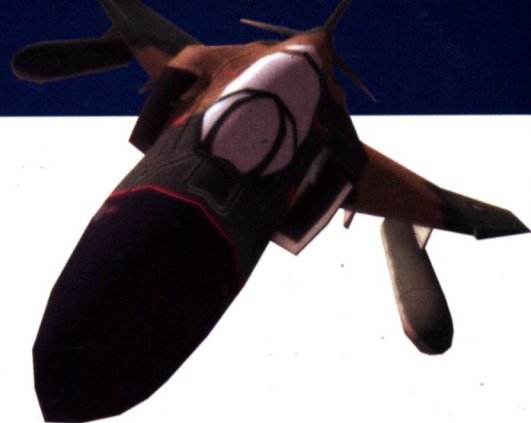
TOCA Race Driver 2: revved up and raring to go.

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

REVIEWED ISSUE 141 (BY PAUL PRESLEY), SCORE: 87%

What we thought

"DICE has done enough to justify the status of 'sequel' rather than 'expansion pack'. It looks great, sounds funky and plays superbly."

What you said

This is simply the best game I've ever played: every game is different, the maps are well constructed and firefights can break out anywhere. I can remember crouching behind a

"This is simply the best game I've ever played and firefights can break out anywhere"

GARY FISHER IS LOVED UP BY *BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM*

building watching a Phantom scream overhead dropping napalm while a Huey flew nose-down right across my line of vision – pure *Apocalypse Now*. Or the time I jumped on board a Huey, piloted by a guy who actually knew what he was doing and spent ten minutes as a door

gunner hosing down hot LZs. Has EA got the balance right? You bet! Offline, I played three games on the same map: my side lost two and won one, and the AI is excellent.

Gary Fisher

Whoever designed the helicopter controls was a plank! Although realistic (using collective and cyclical controls), the helicopters are very unforgiving to fly. This really

spoilt the game for me, especially as any Vietnam game *has* to get the helicopters right.

The biggest problem, though, is the lack of a proper single-player campaign. Frustratingly, your AI-controlled comrades bugger off in the nearest helicopter or tank and leave you

to slog to the front on your own. You often feel disconnected from the battle experience, as nobody pays you any attention. I really think the developer has missed the opportunity to use the excellent game engine and marry it to an *Operation Flashpoint*-style campaign.

Gavin Hay

Prezzer's comment:

Fair points one and all. Helicopters can be a bugger to fly unless you spend a lot of time familiarising yourself with their idiosyncratic controls. Find a server with pilots who know what they're doing however, and the game opens up immensely. Still never seen one land though, but then it's not a simulator. The AI could be better, but then EA never claimed it was making the single-player game as anything other than a cursory add-on. As far as multiplayer games go, *BFV* is the shooter that keeps on giving.

PAINKILLER

REVIEWED ISSUE 142 (BY JAMIE SEFTON), SCORE: 83%

What we thought

"A no-nonsense run-and-gun blaster. Anyone who's been brought up on the visceral thrills of *Doom* will feel their hearts glow with warmth."

What you said

Some people are getting a bit sniffy about *Painkiller*, but they're just soulless types who wouldn't know fun if it was attached to a stake and plunged into their head. *Painkiller* isn't perfect, I don't like the Tarot system very much, but I had a lot of fun with it – and that's what gaming is all about really, isn't it?

Alex Burton

83 per cent? What were you thinking! This game is by far and away the best FPS I've ever played. In my humble opinion, the graphics are superior to games such as *Far Cry* and the sheer carnage of the playability draws you back again and again.

Please remember that some of us like games like *Heretic*, *Doom*, *Serious Sam* and the like for the escapism they provide from the grind of everyday work. *Painkiller* is the natural successor to *Doom* – maybe I'm a little old-fashioned in my attitude to games, but *Painkiller* reminds me of those halcyon days in the mid-90s when the FPS was fresh and new.

Richard Harden

Jamie's comment:

Now then Richard. *Painkiller* is good, stupid fun, but I'd hardly call it the best shooter ever. What it does (and does well) is to provide some good, clean, mindless violence that

benefits both the body and the soul. It doesn't rewrite the rulebook, but it does let you freeze hell-hounds before blowing them into bloody chunks. Always a good thing.

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

REVIEWED ISSUE 142 (BY STEVE HILL), SCORE: 89%

What we thought

"With its depth and variety, *TOCA Race Driver 2* almost renders other driving games obsolete – there's enough here to keep you busy for weeks."

What you said

It's a definite improvement over the last one. *Race Driver 2* is a much more forgiving drive and the story is mildly less irritating – apart from your drunken Scottish manager, who (maybe due to the all the booze he's consumed) repeats exactly the same phrases throughout every race. Some of the racing types are a bit pants mind, particularly the trucks and rally cars.

Wijwoj

A full review, yet no mention of the drastically different Pro and Sim game modes? What about mentioning the great graphics and sound and the really impressive rain effects? No? Well, how's about saying that it's a million miles better than *Race Driver 1*, and probably even better than the old *TOCA 2*?

alexmcb

Steve's comment:

Wijwoj, you've essentially distilled my review into a succinct paragraph, and as such you're absolutely right. As for alexmcb: dear boy, it's a review, not a manual. And "mentioning the great graphics and sound" is something I'd hoped we'd seen the back of in *Your Sinclair*. As the score suggests, it's a great game: I'm still playing it, online and off. PCZ

BFV: tan-inducing fun.

THE JURY

ANTHONY 'SHOKUPAN' HOLDEN

MARTIN 'NAMELESS ONE' KORDA

WILL 'BATSPHINX' PORTER

PAUL 'I R BABOON' PRESLEY

JAMIE 'NORTHERN SCUM' SEFTON

RICHIE 'ZAPATERO' SHOEMAKER

SUPERTEST:

ONLINE SHOOTERS

PC ZONE's monthly debate gets bloody, as we squad up to find the greatest shooter on the Net. *Martin Korda* takes the point

THE CONTENDERS

BATTLEFIELD 1942 /VIETNAM ISSUE 121/ 141, SCORE 79%/87%

WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY ISSUE 131, SCORE 89%

HALO (MULTIPLAYER) ISSUE 136, SCORE 86%

PLANETSIDE ISSUE 131, SCORE 82%

SAVAGE ISSUE 138, SCORE 80%

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 ISSUE 138, SCORE 91%

TWO YEARS AGO, things were simple: either you played *Counter-Strike* or you didn't play online shooters. Sure, you had your occasional *Quake III* or *UT* diehard, but the world was a more straightforward place. Now, we can barely turn round without bumping into another brilliant online shooter. They're bigger, better and more diverse than ever, and the popularity of the genre is soaring.

Compiling our shortlist for this Supertest wasn't easy, but we decided early on to dispense with

ageing classics like *C-S* in favour of more recent offerings. The genre has evolved of late, and we've tried to reflect that with our choices, taking in everything from massively multiplayer shooters and online RTS/FPS hybrids to traditional Deathmatch-based blasters. We've also given honorary mentions to our favourite online shooters that didn't make the list, meaning that we've left no stone unturned.

So without further delay, let's jump into the fray and find out who's the daddy of the online shooter world...

HALO

Jamie: I love this game. The vehicles are brilliant, an excellent mix of flying vehicles and jeeps, and they all handle so well. Doing a kamikaze dive-bomber run at people is amazing. The new weapons for multiplayer – the flamethrower and the fuelrod – add so much to it too.

Will: Do they?

Jamie: Yeah, they add a whole new dimension to the old Xbox maps.

Will: I thought the flamethrower was useless. You can't ever get close enough to use it properly.

Jamie: Sure, there aren't many tactics involved. It's just a case of piling in and shooting everything.

Martin: I think it's the ultimate *fun* shooter.

Paul: It's great, because even if you aren't very good at shooters, you can still get scores in double figures.

Martin: I think the key to a great online shooter is whether it still works if people don't work as a team – and I think this one definitely does.

Richie: Are you sure we're still talking about *Halo*?

Martin: Not a fan Richie?

Richie: Well, I agree the vehicles and physics are fantastic, but the way it plays isn't great. There's a really elastic feel to the controls and the HUD is covered in huge icons and text that obscures absolutely everything.

Martin: Graphically, it's not the strongest game here.

Richie: Actually, I think the graphics are quite good – I just don't feel that it's a game made for the PC. Compared to *UT2004*, it's inferior in every way.

Anthony: Save it for the *UT* bit, Shoemaker. *(Everyone laughs. Richie scowls.)*

Anthony: I agree with Jamie on this one. I'd rather play *Halo* than *UT2004* for a basic Deathmatch with vehicles. It seems simple at first, but I think it's a game with some real hidden depths.

Martin: Definitely. Each level really lends itself to a particular playing style. Some are great for

Multiplayer Halo is all-out action entertainment.

"When you get into it, it's fantastic – it becomes the best thing you've ever played"

PAUL PRESLEY LOVES A BIT OF *PLANETSIDE*

Anthony: The team modes are shit. It's all about the Deathmatch. Not that they call it Deathmatch.

Jamie: Slayer!

Anthony: What rubbish. Why didn't they just call it Deathmatch in the first place?

Jamie: I remember the first time I played it: there were about 12 of us and we all spawned with rocket launchers. There were missiles flying about the place and people exploding. It was really hilarious.

Martin: It reminded me of *Quake III* with vehicles.

Paul: Yeah, but it's a fun *Quake III*. I always found *Quake III* so deadly serious and I hated it for that.

Jamie: And the way the bodies fall out of the vehicles, it's hilarious.

sniping, others are perfect for aerial attacks.

Will: You need to be playing a balanced game with balanced weapons for it to be fun, though. Jamie was saying that he loved the rocket launchers, but I hate them. Once someone gets one of the bigger weapons, they just go round killing everyone.

Paul: I don't think the game works indoors at all.

Martin: Agreed. It's all about being outdoors, with vehicles.

Anthony: It's great but limited. If we're honest, we only like a few maps and just one game mode.

PLANETSIDE

Richie: This is a tricky one. I think that when you're in a good group and in a massive battle, it's the best game here. It can be absolutely amazing. At the same

To really enjoy PlanetSide, you need to join a good Outfit.

time, it can be so dull when you're not in a good group.

Martin: On paper, it seems perfect for anyone who loves shooters. It's a massive online war that swings backwards and forwards – but it really doesn't feel like that, especially to a newcomer. It's one of the most daunting games I've ever played. I didn't have a clue what I was doing for the first half an hour, even though I played through the tutorial. But later on I got caught up in a really big battle, and even though I still died all the time, I saw just how good it can be. But how many people will last that long? I've got no inclination to go back to it.

Will: Yeah, but you would if you were paying a monthly fee to play it.

Martin: That's just the thing. I wouldn't pay to play it.

Anthony: That's how it works though – it treads the line between boredom and reward really carefully. It trickles the enjoyment out really slowly at the start, and because your first month is free, you persist with it. There's enough enjoyment to just keep you playing. Then you suddenly hit this time, after you've been playing it for about a week, where it's great and you love it. That lasts for about two months – long enough for you to subscribe. In that time, you try all of the playing styles and certifications, before finally getting sick of it.

Paul: I think the developer's

realised there's not enough content to keep anyone interested for more than about four months.

Anthony: Like Richie said, it hints at great things.

Martin: The interface is so clunky and inaccessible. It just feels like *EverQuest* with guns to me.

Richie: I wouldn't say that. What it does better than most of these games is give you a sense of holding or storming a stronghold and really feeling like it's an epic battle. The infantry battles are superb. But you can play it all night and capture half a continent, then you wake up in the morning and it's all been taken back by the enemy.

Anthony: Exactly. How pointless is that?

Will: It always follows the same template. Nothing new happens.

Paul: Yes, although I think we should acknowledge that the developer is trying to rectify all of this as we speak, by making outfit-owned bases that can be attacked by the enemy to try and make the war actually mean something to people. I think

The new vehicles and weapons give Halo a whole new dimension.

PlanetSide is a great experiment, but it doesn't quite work.

Anthony: I think Will's right. Every time you attack a base, it's the same. Each base is practically identical and they're all shit. And you spawn in the basement and have to walk up the stairs every time.

Richie: If you could storm and take a bridge, or something like that, then it would be so much better.

Anthony: There's nothing of any tactical significance in there.

Will: To be fair though, I think that this Supertest might be catching us on our downward slump from the game, because there was time a few weeks ago when me, Ant and Prezzer all adored it.

Anthony: Yeah, the first two months were great.

Martin: But how many people will be playing it in the same room with their mates? I played it at home on my own and tried to get some semblance of an attack force together and didn't get a single worthwhile reply.

Richie: You have to find yourself an Outfit.

Paul: Even Ant joined a guild, and that's saying something. *(Everyone laughs.)*

Martin: It would be nice to feel that you can jump in at the start and have some impact on the game. As it is, you start playing and your weapon is rubbish and you die all the time. I unloaded entire clips into the faces of enemies and barely scratched them. Then they shot me twice and I was dead. I just

thought, 'what's the point'? It could have been so much better.

Anthony: You'd probably get into it once you got to a higher command rank.

Martin: The problem is, I don't even want to try getting there.

Anthony: It also punishes you all the time for no reason. This is what made me angriest. When you die you have to wait 60 seconds till you respawn. You die and want to quit – oh, no wait, you can't. You have to respawn first.

Paul: It's still a fantastic game though. It's not at the beginning or at the end, but in the middle when you really get into it. Then it suddenly becomes the best thing that you've ever played.

WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

Paul: It's free!

Everyone bar Jamie: It's free!

Jamie: How much?

(Sniggers all round.)

Paul: It's a great game, if limited.

Will: I loved it. It's quite self-contained, but the maps are brilliantly designed. It's a great pick-up-and-play game, and has far more tactics and teamplay than *Halo*. I didn't like the mine-laying, though.

Jamie: Yeah, I'll just go and pick up that weapon. Oh, it's mined.

Will: Everything gets mined, usually by Anthony.

Anthony: But that just means you have to start playing the game properly and have someone spotting mines – working as a team.

Martin: I agree. On the surface, it looks really simplistic, but because you have all of these different classes and lots of mission objectives, you're forced to work as a team to make the game work.

Anthony: That's true, because when we started playing it, we just ran around like it was *Quake*. But then suddenly, someone

discovered that you can lay mines...

Will: Yeah – you.

Anthony: ...And then it took us another couple of days to discover something else. The more you learn, the better it becomes.

Jamie: I love the train level, where it's being taken backwards and forwards – and the way that you can capture new spawn points.

Will: That's a great level, especially when you lay ambushes for the train and you're hiding, wondering how many people are actually hiding in the train.

Paul: The levels really do capture the feel of real battles.

Anthony: There are lots of different tactics too. Sure, you can lay mines, but you can change into enemy outfits as well, so you never know whether the person standing right behind you is an enemy spy.

Martin: What do you guys think of the weapons?

Richie: I've always loved the *Wolfenstein* weapons. They have a really meaty feel to them, and I think they're the best weapons of any game around.

Martin: The weapons are satisfyingly realistic, but fun at the same time.

Richie: The Panzerfausts are totally useless, though.

Will: It was the first time I'd ever wanted to play as a medic. It felt great running around helping people.

Anthony: It was the first team-based game that stopped us playing *Counter-Strike*. The different kinds of objectives and especially the moving objectives partially solved the problem that *C-S* had with choke points. Not completely, but partially.

Martin: It's the only game here that really forces you to use teamwork and that's not easy to achieve.

Enemy Territory. Limited, but fun... And free.

Paul: I love the fact that you can increase your skill levels too, so the more you do a certain thing, the better you become.

Martin: That comes back to what I was saying earlier. *Enemy Territory*, unlike *PlanetSide*, is instantly accessible. You can build your character up in 20 minutes and have fun at the same time.

"It's taken that brave step we've all been waiting for, mixing strategy and shooters"

MARTIN KORDA SALUTES *SAVAGE*

Paul: Oh, and I just thought I'd mention that this game is on the *PC ZONE* servers, so get playing everyone.

SAVAGE

Anthony: It's a really good idea, not that well done. The weapons really annoy me. They're incongruous.

Martin: It's ridiculous. One minute you're a tomahawk-toting Red Indian, the next minute you're running around with a laser. You go from a Neanderthal thug to futuristic commando in about five minutes flat.

Anthony: It's got the most ridiculous research tree ever.

Martin: Tomahawk. Bow and arrow. Atom bomb. *(Everyone laughs.)*

Anthony: What's more, some of the weapons are just rubbish. Like the one where you can hose everyone down with what looks like a lightning bolt. There's no skill involved, even though there are still some good ideas in the game.

Will: It's so different that it should be applauded. Maybe it's not as well executed as it could've been, but it deserves to be successful.

Paul: It can be really playable if you have a good commander. A lot of clans work together and pick a commander, which means the game works a lot better.

Anthony: But there's not enough reward for being the commander. And if you're not playing with one of these super-organised teams, you get voted off too easily.

Jamie: Well, that's democracy for you.

Paul: It's not a democracy issue.

Anthony: All it takes is for one person to suggest impeaching the commander and everyone just jumps on board and says, 'yeah, vote the commander off!'

Richie: I think there are a lot of people who aren't playing this game properly and are just treating it as they would any

other shooter. The game itself doesn't emphasise just how important teamwork is, which is a real problem. And yes, the weapons are poor. It would have been better had it stuck with bow-and-arrow-type weapons throughout the game.

Paul: I'd love to see this as the start of a new genre. Imagine taking *C&C* and putting it into this type of game.

Richie: It would've been great if there'd been an option for a massive hand to come down from the sky and slap you around if you didn't follow orders. To be honest, I enjoyed *Savage* because it's different. It really annoys me when you talk to developers of other multiplayer shooters and they say that a command option can't be done in games like this. *Savage* shows that it can be done.

Martin: It's taken that brave step that we've all been waiting for, mixing strategy and shooters. I don't think it's a great game, but I'm glad that someone's finally gone and done it. It could be the start of something great.

Anthony: In five years we'll probably all be playing FPS/RTS hybrids and saying that nobody remembers that *Savage* did it first.

Paul: It's really open to modding too. There are already loads of mods out there which take out all of the stupid weapons and replace them with things like samurai swords. Oh, and I just thought I'd mention that this game is also on the *PC ZONE* servers, so get playing everyone.

Martin: Thanks Paul.

BATTLEFIELD 1942/VIETNAM

Martin: I was disappointed with *Battlefield Vietnam*.

Anthony: Me too.

Martin: It looks to me like EA has done its usual thing of slapping a different scenario onto the same game, and then simply added a couple of different vehicles to it.

Savage bridges the gap between the FPS and RTS genres.

Teamwork is a must in *Enemy Territory*.

Ultimately, it's just the same game all over again.

Anthony: Exactly, only it's not as good. The Vietnam setting somehow just doesn't appeal to me as much as 1942. The jungle levels mean you can't see as far or get such a good feel for the battle.

Richie: The vehicles are restricted as well.

Paul: I think that there are a lot of changes that have been made to *Vietnam*, especially under the bonnet. The gameplay is much tighter and the level designs are a lot better. Plus, the vehicles are more balanced and the helicopters easier to fly than the planes were in *1942*. There are also a lot of interesting new additions, such as mobile spawn points and the ability to pick things up. It's not really a sequel though, more like *Battlefield 1.5*.

Anthony: But it's not even as good as the *Desert Combat* mod.

Paul: But if an engine is this great, then why shouldn't you keep adding lots of new war scenarios to the series?

Will: I agree – I love the vibe of *Vietnam*. The new vehicles, tactics and weapons are great. If I was going to play one of the two though, it'd probably be *BF1942*.

Martin: The best thing for me was that you can use the machine guns mounted on to the

Tanks but no tanks. Many still prefer *Battlefield 1942* to *Vietnam*.

long time, that sort of thing. *(Rapturous agreement from all.)*

Paul: I love the psychological warfare in *Vietnam*. If you get to a radio tower and you're playing as the Vietnamese, it'll automatically start broadcasting propaganda messages to the American side, telling them that their government is lying to them and they should all go home.

Anthony: It's not a reason to play the game, though.

Martin: Let's be honest, they're both still very enjoyable thanks

"This game is absolutely amazing – the Onslaught and Assault modes are superb"
RICHIE SHOEMAKER IS STUNNED BY *UT2004*

side of choppers. But then again, if that's the best EA can come up with, I'll stick with *1942*. The problem with both games is they're both a sniper's paradise. Nine times out of ten I've got no idea where I've been shot from, and that's not fun. The developer really needs to address this problem with the next game.

Richie: Yeah, after playing it for a couple of hours, you work out that all you need to do well is become a sniper or get yourself a heavy machine gun, as all the other classes and weapons are useless. And unless you're playing on an organised server, it's just a free-for-all. Everyone just jumps into vehicles and drives off on their own. It's like playing *GTA*.

Will: I've never played either game with the idea of winning. For me, it's all about getting into vehicles and having a laugh.

Anthony: Maybe they should make a *GTA: Vietnam*: you know, put some hookers in. Love you

to all the vehicles that you can drive or pilot and the wide-open levels. But I just don't think these games are as great as they're cracked up to be.

Richie: Too many people just try and have a good time rather than working as a team. Both of these games would be inmurumably better…

Anthony: They'd be what?

Martin: You said inmurumably.

Richie: Er, they'd be *a lot* better… If you had one guy in charge giving out orders, and if people didn't follow those orders, they'd respawn with just a knife. In their pants.

Martin: Exactly. And you could have servers that do or don't have command structures, so people can choose.

Paul: You need to join a clan. They all play the game properly.

Anthony: You shouldn't have to join a clan before this game is fun though, godammit!

Paul: Oh, and I just thought I'd mention again that these games

are on the *PC ZONE* servers, so get playing everyone. *(Everyone groans.)*

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Richie: This game is absolutely amazing. You can have an eight-player game, and it feels like 60. There are no boring parts. The Onslaught and Assault modes are superb. It doesn't have that much emphasis on teamwork, but it doesn't really need it.

Martin: Even getting into one of the turrets is so much fun. There are a million things you can do too – the vehicles are fantastic and you can play on your own or as part of a team and still have fun.

Anthony: Exactly – it works really well in that respect. You can be running around in Onslaught doing your own thing, then suddenly you'll get a warning message and everyone will team up to defend a core or complete a task. And once that's done, you can all separate again – it's a good balance.

Jamie: It's brilliant. It's like *Halo* but on a bigger scale,

and hugely enjoyable without being complicated. The bots are brilliant too.

Anthony: I agree – they're the best around.

Jamie: There can just be two of you playing and the rest of the slots can be filled with bots and it's still great – you still feel part of a team.

Martin: They're so real that you even start hating certain ones and start hunting them down.

Jamie: That's why I love it.

Battlefield Vietnam. Same game, different war?

The weapons are also superb. They're perfectly balanced. And with the vehicles, the series has been taken to the next level.

Martin: Most of these games ship with shit bots, but this is different. It's important to have good bots, because when you're playing online, you don't always want to play with strangers or 60 other people, but still want to have a fun and full server. With *UT2004*, you can.

Richie: You don't have to have bots in the game, but it's nice to have the option. That's something you can't do with the *Battlefield* games.

Jamie: It's great to help you practice each level before you go online too.

Martin: Anything to add Prez?

Paul: Oh yeah, I'd better mention that this game is on the *PC ZONE* servers, so get playing everyone.

Martin: There it is. [PCZ]

Unreal Tournament 2004 goes on a Rampage.

UT2004 cuts its opponents down to size.

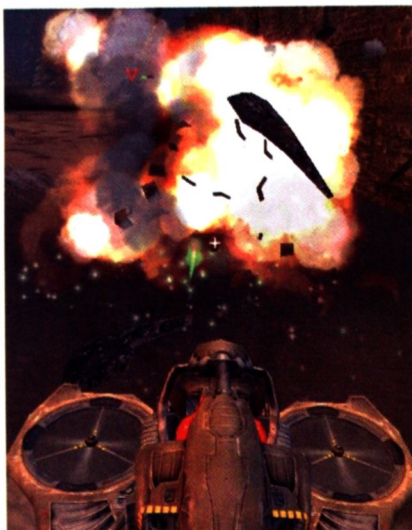## AND THE WINNER IS... UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

EPIC'S LATEST MASTERPIECE BLOWS THE OPPOSITION AWAY

Just like our last Supertest – RPGs – we have a runaway winner. *Unreal Tournament 2004* has exceeded all our expectations, proving not only hugely comprehensive but innovative too, with the new vehicles proving more successful than we ever hoped.

Will picked it because: "It's the most comprehensive package and never gets boring." Jamie simply adored it, saying: "It's the best online shooter and the only one that's just as good offline." Anthony was won over by the new Onslaught mode. "It's just brilliant," he enthused, while quote-friendly Richie stated: "It's got everything you need in one handy package." Martin was equally glowing in his assessment, claiming: "*UT2004* is everything that an online shooter should be."

Paul proved rather more reluctant to vote for *UT*, but despite his fondness for *Battlefield*, he eventually admitted that it was the best of the bunch. So there you have it, all hail *UT2004*, the new king of the online shooters.

The addition of vehicles makes the *Unreal Tournament* series better than ever.

OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN

This is an all-new feature to the Supertest, one where you get to contribute to the discussion and have your say on what game you think should have won. If you'd like to take part in the next Supertest, just log on to www.pczone.co.uk to register your vote and post your comments. Here are just a small selection…

I love every game mode, but my favourite has to be Onslaught. The choice of vehicles is brilliant too – it's a joy to behold.
AlanShep2001 on *UT2004*

It has to be *ET*, for several reasons. It has a mini levelling system, it's playable on a 56k modem, has great maps and objectives and an excellent sense of teamwork.
cheezymon votes for *Enemy Territory*

My vote goes to *BF1942*. The game is fantastic and it's supplemented by some fantastic mods. Plus, I love the huge maps and range of vehicles.
moomoocow8 sides with *Battlefield 1942*
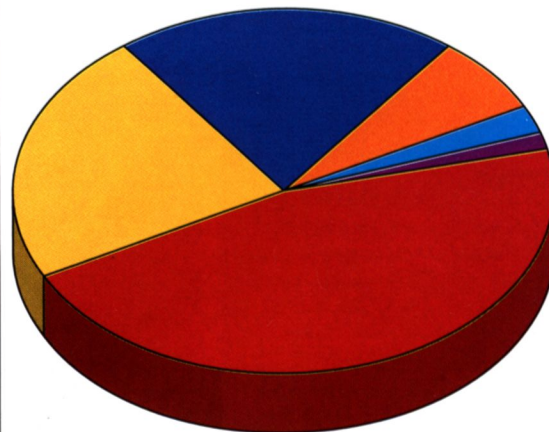
READER VOTES

🟥 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	46%
🟨 BATTLEFIELD 1942/VIETNAM	22.5%
🟦 ENEMY TERRITORY	20.5%
🟧 HALO	7%
🟦 PLANETSIDE	2.5%
🟪 SAVAGE	1.5%

UT2004 is your multiplayer shooter of choice too – by a country mile.

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)	HONORARY MENTION
PAUL	UT2004	BATTLEFIELD 1942	CALL OF DUTY
WILL	UT2004	ENEMY TERRITORY	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II
JAMIE	UT2004	HALO (MULTIPLAYER)	COUNTER-STRIKE
ANTHONY	UT2004	ENEMY TERRITORY	UNREAL II: XMP
RICHIE	UT2004	BATTLEFIELD 1942	COUNTER-STRIKE
MARTIN	UT2004	ENEMY TERRITORY	COUNTER-STRIKE

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	12
2ND	WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY	3
3RD	BATTLEFIELD 1942/VIETNAM	2
4TH	HALO	1
5TH	PLANETSIDE	0
5TH	SAVAGE	0

ONLINE ZONE

OZ: YEAR ZERO

■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ So that's that then. An entire year. Twelve whole months. Thirteen whole issues (don't ask, it's a political thing). 365 days of hitting rats with swords, zapping robots with nano-beams and twatting supervillains with fire bolts from our eyes (an imported copy of *City Of Heroes* is currently the office MMOG of choice). Online Zone is one.

So far, I've tried to keep the mix of bearded fantasy, latex-clad sci-fi and contemporary moral-lacking anarchy just about even, but invariably you can't please everyone all the time. For every letter complaining about the bias towards elven folk, I've had two moaning about the lack of hairy-footed hobbits. Luckily, they've been balanced out by those saying what a great job we're doing and not to change a thing.

Some things didn't stay the course, mind you. You probably noticed that our 'Getting Started' guides have gone from regular fixture to occasional visitor, and the 'Readers' Challenge' was a noble exercise in frustration that we had to put to the sword before it took us all down with it. On that front, however, we've been ironing out the bugs, learning from our mistakes (and can now repeat them exactly), and have been preparing for the 'New & Improved Readers' Challenge' to make a triumphant return next issue! Stay tuned.

It's all very well blowing our own oboes, but without knowing what you think of our efforts, this whole thing is more pointless than an ITV morning talk show. So crank those brain cells into action and send me your thoughts. Fire an email to online.zone@pczone.co.uk and tell us what you think of everything from 'Webgame Of The Month' to 'Welcome To My World'. From 'Guildhall' to 'NeverQuest'. From ▼ here to over there. Roll on year two!

A SECOND HELPING OF DESERT

THE GAME OF FLAX WEAVING AND BRICK BAKING IN ANCIENT EGYPT IS ABOUT TO SPIN A NEW TALE

Almost as peaceful as the real thing.

"The 'Second Telling' is structured so that getting to the good stuff is easier"
ANDREW TEPPER EGENESIS

Want to build you own Hamunaptra? Now you can!

IT'S NOT often that, when you play a game (online or off), you find yourself saying things like: "I just need to feed my camels and I'll be right with you." Or: "I would come out but I've just found a promising seam of zinc." And perhaps more commonly: "Sorry, but it's only half an hour until mushroom time!" But *A Tale In The Desert*, eGenesis's innovative MMORPG set in ancient Egypt did just that. With its lack of combat and emphasis on creativity and community building, as well as a massive world to explore, *ATITD* captured the hearts of many players who wanted something a bit more cerebral than just bashing ever-bigger monsters.

And now, with the wine all drunk, the last monument built and the camels all tucked up in bed, the game is going to be put on a shelf and confined to history. The 'Second Telling' is about to begin.

"*ATITD* was always designed to have a plot – a beginning, a middle and an end," explains Andrew Tepper who, as well as being the head of eGenesis, assumes the role of the Pharaoh in the game. "The Second Telling is more than just a rerun of the same game – it's a chance to add all sorts of new gameplay elements that we've wanted to do for a long time."

There are plenty of new items and skills to explore.

You can build much bigger buildings.

The focus is still on construction.

You're encouraged to work together.

One of the main priorities of this second instalment, which starts the whole game from scratch even for experienced players, is to make it more accessible for the all-important newcomers to Egypt. "By far the most common observation about the 'First Telling' from new players, especially casual players, was that there's a huge amount of cool stuff to do, but most of it requires a heavy time commitment," says Andrew. "The Second Telling is structured so that getting to the good stuff is easier."

Gone will be the endless jogging from place to place, in favour of a new travel system that offers instantaneous travel in certain areas and faster movement on the newly built roads. The quantities of goods required to fulfil certain tasks will also be less and Andrew estimates that the Second Telling will last about six months.

The aim is also to introduce a more 'city' feel to the game, with players being able to design large buildings to house their workshops, creating what Andrew describes as a "city vs country feel". Accompanying these features are tweaks to the game's graphics engine which mean more realistic landscapes, environmental effects and character animation.

A Tale In The Desert is still somewhat of a hidden MMORPG, and although it's still quite small when compared to the big players in the genre, it manages to offer more innovation and imagination than most of its rivals put together. The Second Telling will hopefully boost numbers and ensure this gem keeps going telling after telling. We'll be bringing you more news from ancient Egypt soon.

- ■ **Publisher:** eGenesis
- ■ **Developer:** eGenesis
- ■ **ETA:** July/August
- ■ **Website:** www.atitd.com

THE ONLINE SHORTS

SPIRIT-ED NEWS FROM THE VIRTUAL WORLDS

EQII BETA BEGINS
Sony Online Entertainment has announced the start of the eagerly awaited *EverQuest II* beta testing, along with the glorious news that we Europeans will be allowed in to sample the goodness. Earlier this June, the sign-ups began (at www.everquest2.com) – and if you hurry, you might still be able to book a slot before the July testing commences.

OMENS OF WAR
Back in the original *EverQuest*, concerned Norrathians are gearing up for the upcoming *Omens Of War* expansion pack. Pushed back to a late August release date (following concerns about the *Gates Of Discord* expansion causing player problems), the new pack overhauls the graphics, ups the level count and introduces new 'epic' content such as unique swords and lengthy quests.

NO RUSH FOR RYZOM
Bad news for eco-warriors – bio-friendly MMOG *The Saga Of Ryzom* has been held back till September. In an open letter to the community, *Ryzom's* lead designer explained that time was needed to "squash bugs, add content and continue developing the game." Beta testers will still get to enjoy regular 'weekend events' once the beta closes.

WRATH OF KHAN
Mirinae Entertainment, the so-called 'Blizzard of the East', has revealed plans to storm the shores of the west with Korea's most popular historical MMORPG, *Khan – The Absolute Power*. Based on the travails of Genghis Khan, *Khan* gives you the chance to fight the legendary barbarian on his home turf. All together now: "From hell's heart I stab at thee…"

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

INUYASHA DEMON TOURNAMENT
(WWW.ADULTSWIM.COM/GAMES)
There was a time, thousands of Earth years ago, when yours truly was all set to sit at the helm of Britain's official *Magic: The Gathering* collectible card magazine. Despite making me less socially popular than venereal disease, I was open about my addiction to those pesky bits of laminated gaming cards and their fancy pictures of dragons and that.

However, my passion for pretending to be in a cabal of modern-day mages waned into a more sensible (paying) gig as the head of *PC ZONE's* virtual worlds department.

Such a background has left its imprint on my psyche though, and as a result I can never quite turn away from games involving the advanced *Top Trumps* dynamic. Couple that with characters and settings based on popular Generation X cartoon fare such as the Adult Swim programming on the Cartoon Network and you

I'll play Mr Bun The Baker next…

might as well write my productivity levels off for the next few days.

InuYasha Demon Tournament is based on the cartoon series about a modern schoolgirl battling demons in ancient Japan. You pick a combo of three cards from your deck (fighting, movement and defensive actions), and face off against one of five opponents. The strategy comes in second-guessing your enemy in order to make your cards pay off in full. Nothing's more annoying than setting up a devastating Phoenix attack, only to see your target innocently hop one square out of reach the turn before.

Simple, undemanding – maybe. But it's fun, with plenty of variety in the cards to keep things different each time you play. Best of all though, is it's only a short hop from *InuYasha* to the *Harvey Birdman, Attorney At Law Text Adventure*. Now that *is* old school.

CLAN DIARY

INFINITY E-SPORTS

PHILIP WRIDE, Manager

Our *Counter-Strike* team scored a decisive victory.

Another busy couple of weeks sees us getting closer to the much-anticipated CPL Summer event in Dallas and all the I-eS squads have been preparing nicely. First off the *Counter-Strike* team 'boot-camped' in Hull at The Hub (www.the-hub.info) before the UKT6 event. The practice paid off and the team went on to win the competition, beating a rival magazine's dedicated crew in the final by quite a convincing score line. It surprised a number of doubters in the community and showed that we really are the UK number two and pushing hard for the top spot. On top of this our *Call Of Duty* team have reformed with a number of previous players and are striving to regain their European top ten spot.

"The *C-S* team won the event, beating a rival magazine's dedicated crew in the final by quite a convincing score"

The *Warcraft III* part of the team have had more success, claiming the title for the Clanbase Eurocup, while our Russian superstars – Ranger, Karma and Flash – took part in a seasonal tournament in Russia and managed to take all top three spots. Not only this, but a new league has started and the guys have gotten off to a flying start by winning their first two games quite comfortably. Individually the players are doing fantastically well and new blood in the form of Korean superstars Lyn and 'HomeRunBall' have only strengthened the squad.

Other good news comes in the form of a new partnership for the team. None other than Creative has agreed to provide us with its top-range sound cards, giving all of us the latest and greatest in sound quality. Couple this with the Sennheiser support, and we're all sounding better than ever. We are also continuing to work with 4u-Servers, one of the UK's leading game server providers, and Lchost, the best place for web hosting.

All in all, some really nice results and plenty of support for the team. If you have any questions about us or our activities, please feel free to email me at phil@infinity-esports.co.uk. Till next time…

A GALAXY FAIRE FAR AWAY

STAR WARS GALAXIES FANS ATTEND FIRST-EVER CONVENTION

FOLLOWING THE mammoth success of the fifth anniversary *EverQuest* Fan Faire back in April, Sony Online recently gave the dedicated inhabitants of *Star Wars Galaxies* a chance to gather under a non-virtual roof. June 4-5 saw the Anaheim Hilton in California hosting several hundred online Jedi-in-training, who got to attend developer-hosted forums, live quest events, grand banquets and the inevitable costume contests.

The Fan Fest also gave *SWG* aficionados their first chance to see the upcoming *Jump To Lightspeed* expansion pack in action. The pack's real-time space

If your name's not on the list, you ain't coming in.

combat action finally adds the missing piece of the *Star Wars* puzzle to the firmly established MMOG universe.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the Wookiee sound-alike contest, which gave throat warblers a chance to shine in the spotlight with their cries of anguish and despair – and to win prizes for their efforts.

Sony is hoping to host the Fest on a biannual basis at varying locations. The popularity of this one can only bode well for both future events and the long-term popularity of the game.

STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: CSPORTS.net

TOP FIVE *UT2004* MAPS (WEEK ENDING MAY 24, 2004)
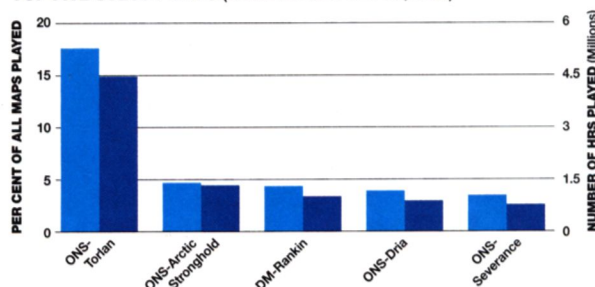
KEY ■ PERCENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED   ■ NUMBER OF HOURS PLAYED (Millions)

TOP FIVE *PAINKILLER* MAPS (WEEK ENDING MAY 24, 2004)
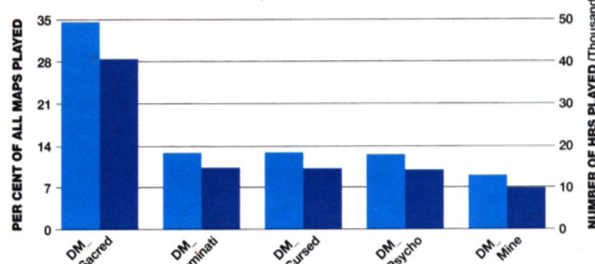
KEY ■ PER CENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED   ■ NUMBER OF HOURS PLAYED (Thousands)

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF SERVER NUMBERS (WEEK ENDING MAY 24, 2004)

NUMBER OF FPS SERVERS

Region	Servers
NORTH AMERICA	32,433
EUROPE	25,106
FAR EAST	2,067
AUSTRALASIA	1,837
EASTERN EUROPE	1,812
SOUTH AMERICA	952
MIDDLE EAST	415
ASIA	249
AFRICA	87
ANTARCTICA	0
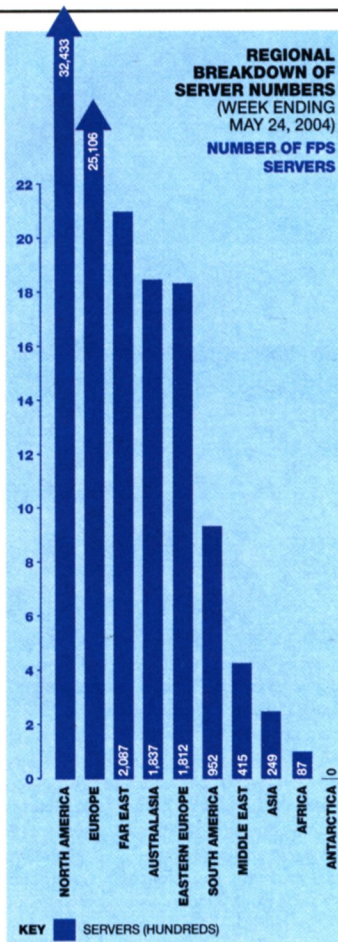
KEY ■ SERVERS (HUNDREDS)

WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Victor Meinert – Tabula Rasa

"YOU MEAN challenges, right?" The mood of Victor Meinert is probably best described as upbeat. With good reason too. Having had a suitably successful E3, the team behind Richard 'Lord British' Garriott's return to the gaming world, *Tabula Rasa*, are being almost overrun by praise-filled column inches the world over. So when asked what have been the most notable problems encountered in realising the sci-fi world, Meinert, *Tabula Rasa's* art director, prefers to think in more positive terms.

"There have been quite a few, none of them showstopping, some more twisted than others," he begins. "Mainly, it's attempting to create a stunning, cuttingedge visual product while still offering an optimised and extendable content base from which to play the game."

At least the team seems to be relishing the challenge. Garriott's previous games (notably the *Ultima* series of RPGs) have always lived in the realistic detail, so it's no surprise that the team at Destination Games trades as much on game design skills as realworld talents. Meinert's non-gaming background lies in architecture, so it's understandable that the visual design of the many locales in *Tabula Rasa* give him immense satisfaction. "We have a great passion for these aspects of our product," he says. "We've had a great time coming up with the styles you find in *TR*."

Indeed, the list of names Meinert cites as having influenced his work on the game reads like a who's who of artists from the art nouveau period – Alphonse Mucha, Victor Horta, Lalique – as well as more contemporary artists such as the Japanese styles of Terada and Yasushi Nirasawa.

All of which explains why anyone who writes about *Tabula Rasa* invariably focuses on the extraordinary visual style of the game world – which is where most of the aforementioned challenges still lie. "Every art team is focused on optimal performance, but in an online game the concerns are somewhat unique," Meinert explains. "You have shared, persistent environments that can be dynamically filled with an unknown version of any asset, the desire for a highly customisable avatar – and on top of that a demand for cyclical expansions and constant asset growth. All the while making all of those things more unique and beautiful than anything you've ever seen before. Fun!" Let's hope so. **PCZ**

> "Every art team is focused on optimal performance, but in an online game the concerns are somewhat unique"
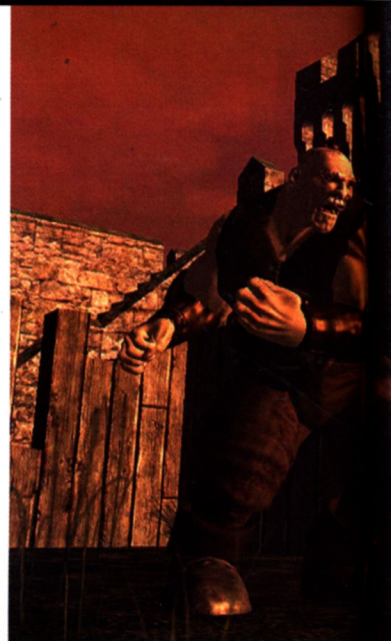>
> **VICTOR MEINERT**, *TABULA RASA*

■ **Publisher:** NCsoft
■ **Developer:** Destination Games
■ **ETA:** TBC
■ **Website:** www.playtr.com

Stop – hammer time!

Become a Town Guard. It's exciting.

WARHAMMER ONLINE

Drinking, fighting, swearing and mud. *Paul Presley* visits the MMORPG equivalent of the Reading Festival...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Games Workshop/ Climax
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE
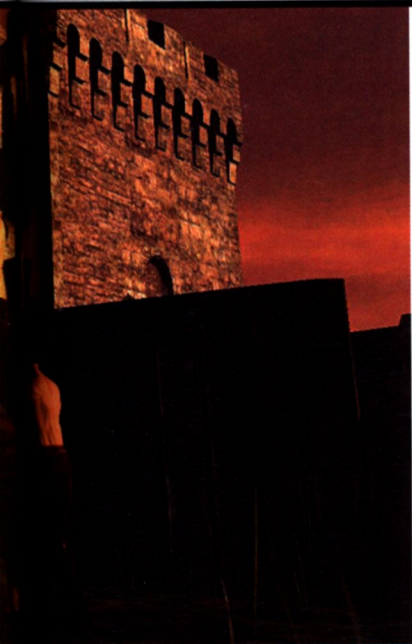www.warhammeronline.com
ETA Early 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Based on the most popular tabletop wargame of all time
■ Violent, intricate combat system
■ Detailed career paths with associated skills
■ Dark, gritty, muddy and thoroughly British

"WHEN YOU were a kid you either hit people with sticks, you nicked pies or you were speccy and you studied a lot." Robin Dews, general manager of the team creating Games Workshop's entry into the rapidly crowding fantasy MMOG market, is describing the basic concepts behind character creation in *Warhammer Online*. Having taken the opportunity to traipse around the bustling madness that was this year's E3 and sneak a look at several of the competing titles, Dews is more pleased than ever about the way *WHO* is challenging emerging conventions in the genre.

Now, several months later and back at his Nottingham base, away from the hurried half-hour appointment template, Dews and fellow designers Paul Barnett and Neil Roberts have more time to expand upon the game's mechanics.

"We don't do 'broad and thin'," explains Barnett. "We do 'narrow, but deep'. We had to take a big cleaver to some game design issues. We asked ourselves what was broad and thin that we don't like doing. Making hats. That's broad and bloody rubbish. We'll not have that. Farming, that's broad.

Where're the burning torches? Your granddad will remember the film.

CV — GAMES WORKSHOP

GAMES WORKSHOP

Games Workshop is best known for 'offline' or tabletop gaming rather than the computerised variety.

1970 Games Workshop founded by three avid hobbyists, selling copies of an early tabletop role-playing game from the back of their van.

1976 The first Games Workshop store opens in Hammersmith, London.

1982 The first rules for *Warhammer* are created and, combined with the figurines, it becomes an instant gaming classic.

1994 Company floats on stock exchange. The future in orc bellies looks strong.

2000 GW is granted the licence to create figures and game systems based on the *Lord Of The Rings* film trilogy.

2001 Work begins on *Warhammer Online* – the firm's first real attempt at computer gaming.

"Bugger, the sausages are burnt."

Must be something he ate.

"Mind you don't catch my nipple ring."

WHERE'S WOODWARD?

WANTED: WITCH-HUNTER WITH BURNING AMBITION. TWO GROATS A DAY + BENEFITS

One of the more interesting careers you can choose is that of medieval witch-hunter. Brandishing twin flintlock pistols, these guys have to hunt down heretics – players that have been infected by the creeping forces of chaos that plague the lands – and deliver holy justice…

"They'll be able to build these great big burning braziers that have a radius around them," explains Barnett with unnerving passion. "Anyone infected that comes within the radius will be identified, and out come the pistols. So you'll have these hunters running around town shouting, 'Out of my way! He's a heretic!' and putting things to the sword or, indeed, the torch. We like burning things. We've got full-on wicker men." Lovely.

Who left the gas on...?

Chuck that off the table. And then we thought about what was narrow but deep, at which point someone said, 'A sword'."

Combat is integral to the *WHO* universe. Violence is sudden, brutal and filled with blood. Fighting is both tactical and strategic, and you'll have to combine your skills in ways that suit whatever worrying situation you find yourself in. The point is that you should never really know what's going to happen in a fight before it begins. Hence the lack of monster evaluation systems. If something looks hard, it probably is.

READY TO RUMBLE

"The point about combat – based on real-world design principles – is that in the real world it's always dangerous," explains Dews. "It's dangerous because it's unpredictable. You don't know what the outcome will be. Most MMOGs make things predictable and offer little interactivity. They take all the excitement out of it." Magic plays a big part in this too.

Wizards, while looked down upon by most members of society, are capable of pretty terrifying effects if they put their minds to it and progress through their career paths. "We don't have namby-pamby magic," assures Barnett. "No purple. No bloody particle effects. No 'ooh, ahh' music. For us it's mumbling, sulphurous smoke and dangerous muttering. Magic is in-your-face the moment it blows your head off. That's the message – it's about combat, you muppet."

That career system is another way Dews and the team are hoping to make *WHO* stand out from the crowd (that and the big spikes protruding from just about everything). With one of the three basic archetypes chosen (fighter, thief, scholar) you start down one of the many associated careers, each coming with an appropriate set of skills. Dews explains: "If you choose a warrior, say, you can move along the combat careers – the city watch, militiamen and so on. That doesn't mean you can't then say, 'Actually, I want to go and learn some magic'. But if you chose a different archetype, it'll take you a lot longer to progress along that path."

CAREERING OFF

Changing careers means changing skills, although you don't automatically lose your existing specialisations. Unused skills are subject to a decaying process. Or as Barnett puts it: "If you change from a magician to a thief you can still cast spells, because you used to be a wizard, with just enough proficiency for a broad range. But after a while you'll no longer have access to the super-duper über ones, because you no longer have your magic stick and you no longer have your pointy hat and you've shaved off your big beard. And we all know that the most powerful wizards have big sticks, pointy hats and big beards."

"Our main task in the graphics department was to take these lead miniatures and transfer them into the aesthetic of a computer game," recalls Roberts. "It's a completely different medium from working with a couple of inches of lead." Thirty years of modelling experience certainly helped, but the main task was to retain the level of customisation that gamers get from painting tiny figures however they want. Partly it comes through hue shifting – letting you colour your character's hair, armour, clothing. But mainly it's through the component system.

"For player characters we have in excess of 30 separate components," says Roberts, "so when a player is changing these body parts, putting some new armour on for instance, it's not just a texture change, but a whole geometry change."

YOUR MOTHER

Doesn't all this abandonment of established concepts mean that *WHO* will find itself alienating a significant portion of the market? "Our take on that is if you want to be a baker or a candlestick maker, this isn't your game. Go and play *The Sims Online*," responds Dews as our visit draws to a close. "*Warhammer Online* won't appeal to everybody and we don't care. We're not trying to appeal to everybody."

"Your mother wouldn't like it, but then we don't like your mother," concludes Barnett succinctly. Quite. **PCZ**

> "We thought about what was narrow but deep, at which point someone said, 'a sword'"
>
> PAUL BARNETT, DESIGNER, GAMES WORKSHOP

LOUD AND CLEAR

Voice communication software has changed the way we play online. *Richie Shoemaker* **explains how it works, what you need and what to look for**

TWO TEAMS of equal ability face up to each other, both playing the same game. One is fully equipped for using voice communication software, while the other is reliant on traditional text input. There may be the odd variation, but nine times out of ten the voice-enabled team will emerge victorious, probably having much more fun to boot.

Voice-over-IP (VOIP) software has been around for years and while the software has been capable, few developers – NovaLogic being about the only exception – have been willing to adapt the technology to any degree of sophistication. Part of the reason for the slow evolution has been the preponderance of narrowband Internet access, since even low-quality transmissions hog precious bandwidth. But with broadband becoming more and more commonplace, 'voice-over-net' software can happily co-exist with any game without having any noticeable effect on its performance.

Of course, your VOIP software has to run in the background – but this isn't a problem, because once you've set up the software, tweaked your audio input levels and configured your connection options, all you need to do is press a key and speak, or just speak (the software automatically detects your voice and transmits it across the server).

Sadly, none of these applications are compatible with each other, so if you're a member of a clan that uses software you don't like, you may have to request a transfer.

TEAMSOUND

■ £Free | Current version: 5.6 | www.teamsound.com | Size: 1.75MB

BUGGED and unstable when it was first released, TeamSound still seems to be suffering by way of its reputation. This is a shame, because as well as being vastly improved over the past year, it also boasts a number of excellent features.

Compared to Roger Wilco, TeamSound is vastly superior. Joining or hosting servers is simple, with the added benefit that separate channels can be created and maintained on-the-fly. Sound quality is much better too, with compression levels ranging from 4-32kbps, low enough for modem users to appreciate, all the way up to LAN-quality sound. Voices do tend to sound a bit flat compared to Ventrilo, but not to a level where it impairs the game.

Plus, there are the added sound file and text-to-speech functions, where you press a key and either trigger a .wav sound or have a digitised voice read a phrase out to the channel. Such features may seem a bit pointless, but if you play games when others in the house are sleeping, you can at least key up a few stock phrases rather than remain mute.

THE GOOD: Easy to set up and use, text-to-speech, plays pre-recorded .wav files, good voice options.
THE BAD: Not very fashionable and few server options.

PCZONE VERDICT **70**

ROGER WILCO

■ $4.95 per month (shareware version available) | Current version: Mk.Id3 | www.rogerwilco.com | Size: 790k

ASSIMILATED into the Gamespy consciousness some years ago, Roger Wilco eschews the flashiness of its server-browsing stablemates in favour of simplicity. In terms of features, there are none – you just talk and others listen. Unlike Gamespy Arcade, old man Wilco doesn't hog much in the way of bandwidth either, making it a better option if you're still navigating the Net via a 56k modem. Even better is the 'Host Base Station' feature, which enables you to easily create a server on a remote computer rather than your own, saving even more bandwidth.

Of all the voice communication programs, Roger Wilco is the easiest to initially set up and easier still when joining or creating a server. But there's one big problem and that's the sound quality, which is set so low it's difficult to make out what players are saying in the heat of battle. Also, there are no indicators showing who's speaking, so the more congested the channel, the more likelihood for chaos.

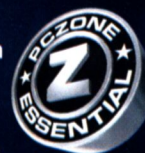**THE GOOD:** Very easy to set up and use, facility to create remote servers, doesn't hog the pipe.
THE BAD: Poor voice quality, lacks even basic features, past its prime.

PCZONE VERDICT **50**

VENTRILO

■ £Free | Current version:
2.2.0 | www.ventrilo.com
| Size: 1.3MB client
(161k server)

VERY MUCH the new kid on the block, Ventrilo has steadily been gaining ground against the leader of the pack – TeamSpeak 2 – and with good reason. For a start, it boasts much clearer voice quality than any of its rivals, which certainly avoids the confusion inherent in games where Roger Wilco is the primary mode of communication. Hassle-free chattering is facilitated further with text-to-speech and .wav file binding, and although TeamSound's text-to-speech sounds better, at least you can create separate profiles for each of your favourite games here.

The downside to all this is that Ventrilo is a bit much for analogue modems to cope with. Also, the developer has recently put a limit on the number of players a server can support before you need a licence, which means if you run a server where you have more than 12 players on your team, you're going to have to shell out to host them all. This is probably not much of a problem for most of us, but certainly a consideration if you prefer your games a little more highly populated.

THE GOOD: Voice quality is second to none, separate profiles for text-to-speech and .wav files, powerful admin tools.
THE BAD: Broadband users only, no 'whisper' feature, looks cheap.

| PCZONE VERDICT | **85** |

TEAMSPEAK 2

■ £Free | Current version: 2.0.32.60 | www.teamspeak.org | Size: 5.8MB client (1.55MB server)

THERE ARE no text-to-speech options, you can't play .wav files and you can't create servers from the main client software. However, for the ratio of bandwidth usage to sound quality, TeamSpeak is by far the better option, simply because it can accommodate both broadband and modem users together quite happily. Comparably, modem users seem to get a raw deal with Ventrilo.

The interface is certainly more substantial than that of its rivals, with public servers that are easy to find, a whisper function that means you can talk to individuals and a vast array of configurable channels home to a potential army of players. For smaller numbers, Ventrilo is far more capable, but TeamSpeak 2 edges ahead where large numbers of players are concerned.

That aside, there's very little to choose between the two: both are immensely popular, very powerful and utterly free, so if you don't get on with one, you can try out the other. And if neither makes you happy, you probably never will be…

THE GOOD: Very easy to set up and use, first-rate interface, excellent server-side option.
THE BAD: Lacks extra features and voice quality could be better.

| PCZONE VERDICT | **84** |

FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

UT2004 saw the *ZONE* team turning out en masse, with Prezzer, Will, Ant, Jamies big and small, Suzy, Korda, Phil, Wandy and Filby taking up arms over the course of the night. Guns flared, rockets flew and everything in the game exploded at least twice as readers came and went with limbs torn asunder and mettle battered and bruised.

A particularly thrilling moment (for us) came when a Hellbender-driving Prezzer took rear-gunner Suzy on a magical mystery ride over the top of a cliff and on a slow-motion, spiralling death dive. Following ladylike cries of "Fahwkin' 'Ell", it was a while before Prezzer was allowed near the controls again.

Star players this month included the indomitable Inferno, continually topping the scoreboards and making us see red, with Redempsion, BossHog and Decimator closely following. JoWoo also put in a classy performance as we were shown up for the cack-handed gimboids we really are.

As you read this, we'll have shown our fighting spirit in the jungles of *Battlefield Vietnam* and should just be gearing up for a return engagement in the war-torn locales of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*. You can read about how we got on (take a guess) and who managed to rub our noses in the dog turds of our own ineptitude over the next two issues.

Meanwhile, we're still gearing up for our Summer Special. What better way to spend these long, hot, lazy days than stuck indoors, away from all that harmful ultraviolet, taking on your favourite *ZONE* writers across a host of games?

As always, to find the connection details for these or any of our public gaming servers, just steer your Internet browsing wagons over towards www.zonegames.co.uk for a list of addresses. See you in the games!

COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO

Paul Presley	Prezzer
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	Jimlad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Phil Wand	Wandy
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat

Even the admins were getting in on the act.

Suzy comes a cropper.

Blue Team PowerNode is under Attack!
You killed Inferno
Will shows his strong side to the readers.

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JULY 1
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

THURSDAY AUGUST 5
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Summer Special Free-For-All

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 9
6.30pm – 9.00pm
UT2004

Prezzer takes Suzy over the edge.

Jamie narrowly avoids disaster.

ZONECHAT

PROVING THAT IT'S NOT ALWAYS GOOD TO TALK…

HALF-LIFE 2.
Amazing how one game can inspire such passion, debate and furtive rumblings among people across the world. Or at least, the little corner of it we call *ZONE* Chat. The human mountain that is Martin Korda graced #pcz with his presence last month, fresh from his Stateside sojourn to Valve's top-secret volcano HQ. Questions about the mega-sequel were fired at the big fella like bullets from a textual gun and he happily recounted his time spent playing the game (lucky bugger).

Fun was had in the competitions, with readers David Wei and Chris Bryce winning, respectively, a copy of *UT2004* and a limited edition *Far Cry* flak jacket. Just what every trigger-happy mercenary about town needs to stay sharp.

Next time, *ZONE* Chat takes place on July 14, 5-7pm on the usual #pcz channel. Aside from the usual free stuff and silly emotes, we'll be talking about the best games to play to stay cool during these hot, summer days.

If you want to take part, you need an IRC program – we recommend mIRC (www.mirc.com) as the most straightforward to use.

Once installed and set up, log on to irc.uk.quakenet.org then type /join #pcz to enter the *PC ZONE* channel. There you'll find a whole gaggle of your fellow Zoners, eager to hold court on matters of great import. Or just what they're having for tea. Chat to you later!

The Prezzer & Will Show

WEDNESDAY JULY 14 5.00PM – 7.00PM

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL SEARCHES FOR AT-LAN-TIS…

■ www.adrenalan.co.uk from July 16-18 at Warwickshire Exhibition Centre is for 300 people. This is a stepping-stone to a 1000+ player event. Costs are £55, or £65 if you want an early start on Thursday. You can bring your own beer, but if the bar is open, you should buy it from there.
■ www.clanlan.net runs July 2-4 in St Helens, Merseyside. Another 30 gamers have to decide which of the many food outlets to visit.
■ If you prefer a slightly larger event, the 60-person Wolflan 7 costs £25 to cover you from July 23-25 in Sherwood Lodge, New Ollerton, East Midlands. Register at www.wolflan.com.
■ Prize for the shortest event has got to go to www.lanparty.org.uk, which is hosting a one-day event, split into two sessions. It's on July 9, with the first session running from 10am-4pm and the second from 4pm-10pm. Cost per session is £4 and there is space for 46 fast burners.
■ The latest Insomnia party is at Stratford-upon-Avon Racecourse. Running from July 23-25, it has 100 places available for £50 a head. Information is available from www.multiplay.co.uk.
■ Scraping in as we go to press is a 20-person event held by www.lansupnorth.co.uk. It's in Hull

on July 16-18, costs £25 and includes free tea, coffee and breakfast butty.
■ Flintshire Frag continues its one-day events with a 35-player party on July 18 at the Holiday Inn on the A55 in Northop Hall, Wales. At £10 a day it's a cheap way to get in a day's uninterrupted gaming, or to keep your marriage intact. To book, visit www.flintfrag.co.uk.
■ Finally, in issue 141 we featured a picture that we said was ClanLan – when actually, it was a shot of Inknet. Shame on us.
If you want your party to feature here, drop me a line with at least two month's advance notice, plus details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk – Scalper out.

Arriving at Flintfrag in style.

GUILDHALL

▲ **REACH OUT AND FRAG SOMEBODY**
Want to rule the gaming world with your gang of gaming gurus? Lacking the leverage to lead the losers? Seeking the soulmates to sweep the servers of stale shooters? Help is at hand. Place an ad below and soon the faithful will be flocking to your fabulous following.

CLAN [PKX] Peacekeepers
CONTACT Sil3nt2 – Clanleader
WEBSITE www.peacekeeperclan.co.uk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS PKX was set up by a group of close friends along with new members from the *Call Of Duty* community, and have created a great and fun clan to be in. Our main goal is to have fun or be daft with our clan joker EwaR-WoowaR.

CLAN 1st British Airborne [1st-BA]
CONTACT garethmsmith@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.1stbritish.tk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We're a strong clan of 38 loyal members, running since November 2003, and have built a good following from Europe and North America. We're currently entered into clanbase, are in the process of joining clanwarz and have two clan servers running for your enjoyment.

CLAN (BM)clan
CONTACT (BM)Kilew-clan leader at lhughes21@msn.com
WEBSITE www.freewebs.com/kilewclanalliance
MAIN GAME *Halo*, *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Battlefield Vietnam*
DETAILS We're looking to recruit new members who enjoy playing online and want to have fun. You don't have to be an experienced player to join – all we ask of you is that you play any of the above games regularly.

CLAN WDDC
CONTACT ejm_tigger@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.freewebs.com/kndgntlmn2
MAIN GAME *WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne*
DETAILS We're looking for players who're 15 or over to join our European clan. We have 20+ members at the moment, but are looking for more. We have clan wars and clan tournaments on a regular basis, with average levels between 12-17 – but all are on the rise.

CLAN Rectory of Evil [RoE]
CONTACT spunkynut1985@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.roeclan.com
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We're a *Call Of Duty* clan made up of players from all over Europe. We have a public 32-player server with the *Total War* mod and a 20-player private/match server. We'd welcome any mature players to come and have a game and a laugh with us.

CLAN RS Red Squadrons
CONTACT rogue@redsquadrons.org
WEBSITE www.redsquadrons.org
MAIN GAME *Ghost Recon*, *Battlefield 1942*, *Medal Of Honor*, *Counter-Strike*, *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*, *Star Trek: Armada I & II* and others
DETAILS Red Squadrons was formed in 1998 as a *Star Trek* clan. We've now ventured into other games in a new section of the clan called the Marine Divisions. We now have servers for *BF*, *C-S*, *MOH*, *EF* and *Halo* and have over 130 members. We look forward to seeing you online.

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.
▼

Power Meter

Too slow

And you thought satire was dead.

Hi, my name is Mickey. What's yours?

"Well I wanted it to be Pubic Hare..."

Earn jellybeans by mercilessly slaughtering fishes.

TOONTOWN ONLINE

Free download (+ £6.99 monthly subscription) | Pub: Disney | Dev: Disney | ETA: Out Now | www.toontown.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 128MB RAM, 8MB 3D card and 56k modem **DESIRES** PIII 500, 256MB, a 32MB 3D card and a broadband connection

You're never too old to enjoy a cartoon, as *Richie Shoemaker* discovers

CLEARLY designed for those more elastic of skin, *Toontown Online* – as its name intimates – is a MMOG set in a day-glo world populated by upstanding creatures who are,

save for the more recognisable Disney faces and stock NPCs, controlled by living, breathing people. Albeit, living, breathing people who are most probably still at the bed-wetting stage of life and doped up to the eyeballs on Sunny D.

Rather than spend precious hours slaughtering wolves and spiders, as is required by fantasy MMOG law, the aim here is to defeat

roving bands of corporate-minded automatons called Cogs, whose collective aim is to take over the bubble gum streets by turning them into bleak rows of office buildings. And so, to keep the nefarious bots at bay, you and your fellow Toon citizens must engage their ranks in turn-based combat, your arsenal stuffed, not with swords and spells, but 'Gags' in the guise of water pistols, fruit-filled pies and weights that fall from the sky to squish those beneath.

Toontown pretty much covers the

same ground as your common-or-garden MMORPG – only here, everything is less pressured and much simpler to get to grips with.

BEANS MEANS GOOD

There are missions aplenty which reward you with jellybeans (*Toontown*'s currency), Laff points (health) or animation clips (skills). The missions are hardly taxing, involving lots of fetching and carrying. Variety comes with the Cog-killing tasks and these add a direction to the game and, more importantly, can be completed in as little as ten minutes. Perfect for the wandering attention spans of most children.

Other Toon pastimes worth dipping in and out of are the Trolley Games, where you climb aboard the local tram and are taken to a random mini-game. Swimming through hoops, catching apples, tug of war and a fairly decent *Pac-Man* clone are just a few of the gems on offer that earn you a small stack of jellybeans to spend later.

Better still, you can play each of the eight games with up to four people, which apart from lending
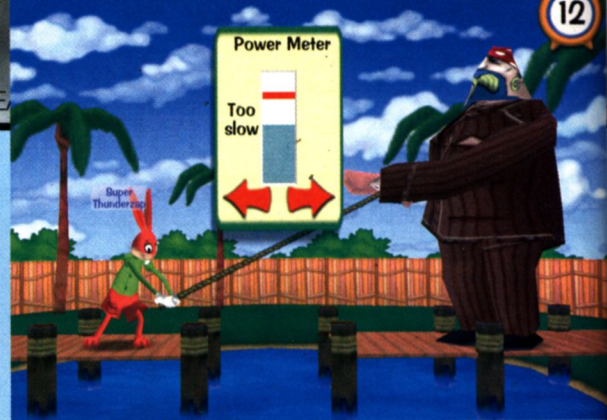
INPERSPECTIVE

CITY OF HEROES
Not Reviewed
Cartoon fun for a slightly older generation that's let down by being totally tied down with the dreaded levelling treadmill. Due for a UK release soon.

THE SIMS ONLINE
Not Reviewed
Hard to find in the UK and even harder to recommend, EA's online version of the world's favourite game is just an online chat room for middle-of-the-road Americans.

Welcome!
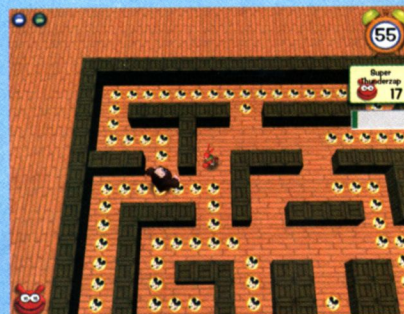
Mickey-brand power pills?

"Don't look at her skirt, don't look at her skirt..."

the proceedings a more competitive edge, may earn you even more sweet financial benefits. With games ranging from Toon Tag (Disney's take on perennial playground favourite British Bulldog) and Match Minnie (where you must copy the dance moves of Mickey's lady mouse friend), the spread is certainly diverse and entertaining. And if you fancy something a little more relaxed, you can go fishing at the central pond and earn yourself even more beans.

The combat itself isn't nearly as entertaining as it might be. Much as I'd have liked to have been able to construct an elaborate trap from pulleys, counterweights and birdseed, or don an Acme rocket pack in emulation of my one-time hero Wile E. Coyote, the combat is simply a case of selecting a gag (Cogs have an aversion to practical jokes) and hoping it hits home, then watching your opponent unleash paper clips and business jargon at you. If he explodes before you run out of Laff points, you receive the usual dribble of experience points. And the more XP you collect, the more gags become available later on.

CHEER UP YOU!

Combat is marginally more interesting when other players join the fray, but even with 'Toon-up' gags that heal other players and Sound gags that can be employed to defeat a line of Cogs, the combat really is about as basic as it gets. Seeing as Toons don't die, player death is not something you have to worry about – if you are defeated in battle, you're simply sent to the nearest playground until you cheer up.

Toontown is unique among its online RPG peers, but certainly isn't for everyone. If you tend to make it your aim in online games to become a high-level killing machine, then you will definitely tire of *Toontown* in just a few hours. Similarly, without any Guild options or proper chat facilities, if you like to role-play you're sure to despise the game for its lack of real player interaction.

However, away from the target market, the game has much to offer the older online gamer; its simplicity and diversity are definite plus points, but most of all it's just a lot of fun – certainly if you prefer to play in fits and bursts.

Along with the option to furnish your crazy Toon house, dress your character up in evermore garish apparel and even expend your wealth of jellybeans on extra moves and emotes, there's plenty to aim for and accomplish. Even on the technical side the game is not left wanting, since you can switch servers effortlessly to join your mates. Basically, all those things that dog most online RPGs don't exist here because it's hard for people to exploit the system. As a consequence, *Toontown* is about the most relaxed and stress-free online game there is. **PCZ**
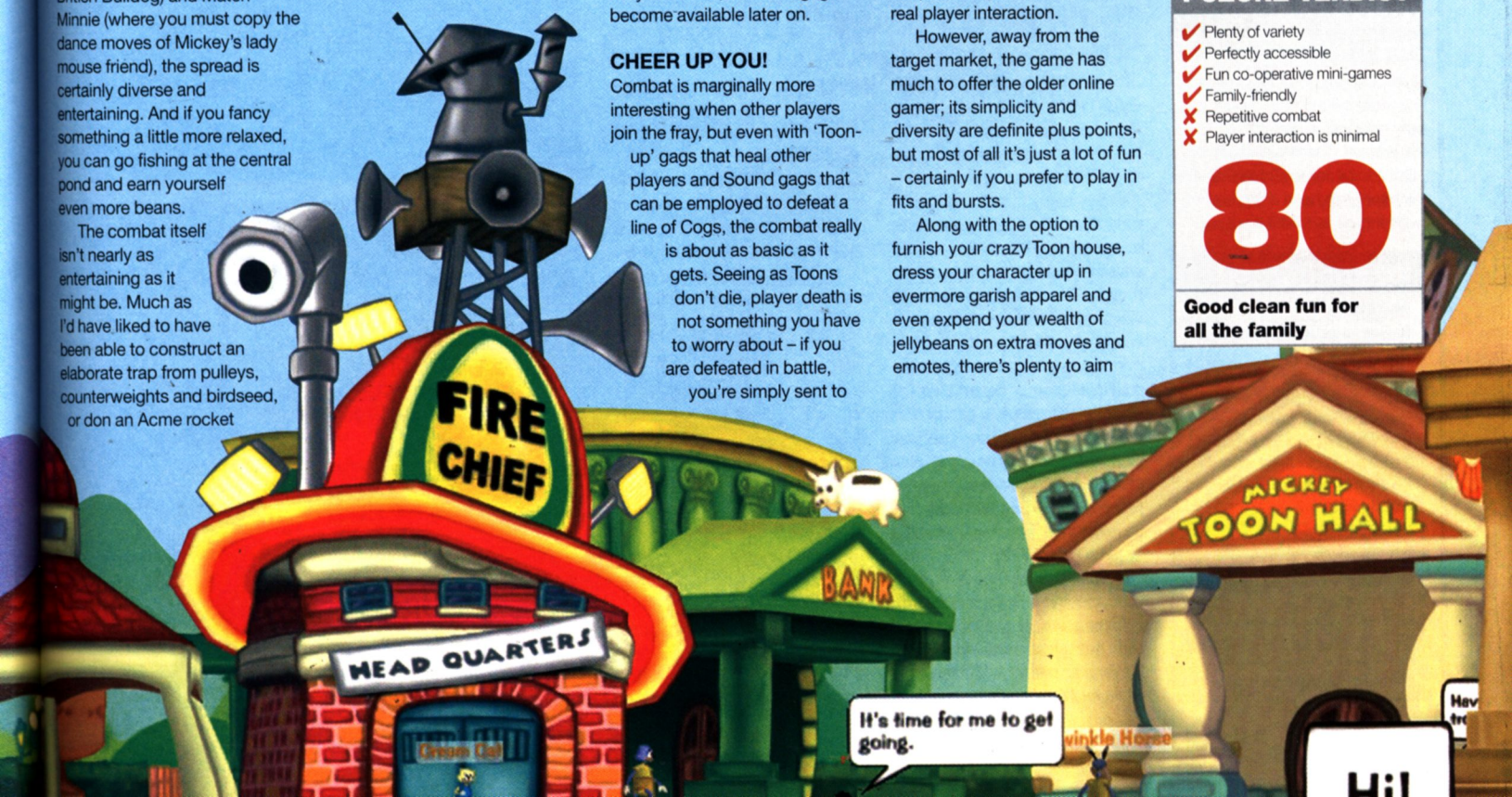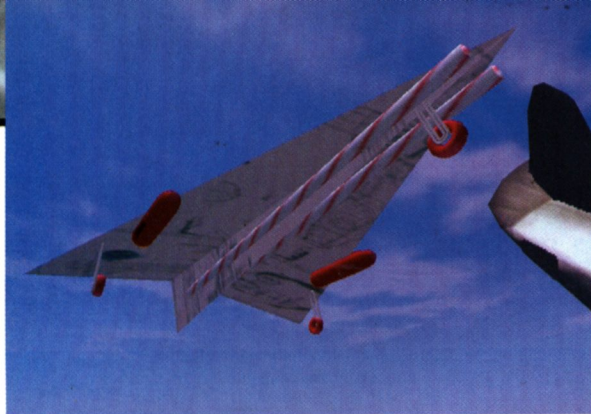
The Paper Aeroplane Jet. Funny for... Oh... Half a second?
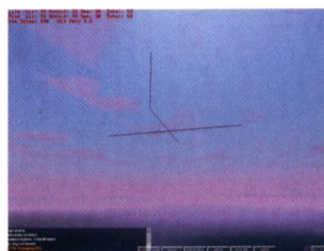

"Knocking the wings off a plane allows it to hang in the sky in the same way a sledgehammer doesn't"

"Help, my sleeve's caught in your flaps!"

Strafing an enemy airfield.

WTF is that supposed to be?

Spent cartridges and lovely 3D modelling.

WARBIRDS 2004

■ **$13.95 a month** | Pub: iEntertainment Network | Dev: iEntertainment Network | ETA: Out Now | **www.totalsims.com**

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, 56k modem
DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, broadband connection, joystick (with rudder and throttle controls)

After being struck by a radioactive propeller, *Daniel Emery* always dreamed of being a WWII pilot and killing people

WITH THE recent surge in World War II games, you'd think developers would be pumping out WWII flight sims. Far from it – the only one of any note we've had is *IL-2 Sturmovik*. Thankfully, that's all about to change. iEntertainment Network has been continually working on its MMO flight sim *WarBirds* (now in its seventh year), and it's come a long way since its inception.

DARTH BADER
If you've never heard of it, *WarBirds* enables you to choose aircraft from either the Allied or Axis side to dogfight in the virtual sky. The planes are accurate replicas not only in the way they look, but in the way they fly. Bullets behave like, well, bullets and knocking the wings off a plane means it can hang in the sky in the same way a sledgehammer doesn't. It's as realistic a sim as you can find, but it's not one that you can just pick up and play. There's a steep learning curve and new players will be cannon fodder for weeks.

WarBirds 2004 is an important release for iEN as it's no longer the only rooster in the chicken coop. The ageing *Aces High* has taken many old-time players, as has *WWII Online*, while *IL-2 Sturmovik* seriously raised the graphical bar, despite being limited to 32 players online. So how has iEN improved the game with this new version?

FLYING WITHOUT A LICENCE
Sadly the first impression, before you even start flying, is that you're playing a beta. The developer has apparently ported aircraft over from *Dawn Of Aces* – quite why is a little beyond us since aircraft from the First World War didn't feature heavily in the 1939-45 campaign. I say 'apparently' because the aircraft aren't easily recognisable. Trying to fly them involves manipulating a bizarre stick-like object, which is a bit lame. There's also some Easter egg aircraft that you can select (except they're not really meant to be Easter eggs), and what looks like a paper aeroplane. Not much fun.

However, while some of the development is still 'in progress', other aspects have progressed apace. One of the criticisms levelled at *WarBirds 3D* was the lack of aircraft variety when compared with *WarBirds II*. Even taking out the vintage planes, there are now over 50 different flyable aircraft, way more than previous versions could boast. Another improvement is the shift in focus away from ground-based warfare and back to aerial combat – it's gone back to its roots and the game is far more enjoyable as a result. There's now also a wider choice of scenarios to fight over – England 1940, Malta 1941, Europe 1945 and a whole load of Pacific maps too.

In all fairness, the only thing that really lets *WarBirds 2004* down is the lack of players knocking around online. Let's hope the new (and improved) version turns that around – but only time will tell. **PCZ**

Sneaking up on an unsuspecting German transporter.

INPERSPECTIVE

WARBIRDS
Reviewed Issue 70, Score 85%
The forefather of *WarBirds 2004*, it's now showing its age. However, the arenas are still fairly busy and it makes a nice trip down memory lane. What's more, it won't cost you a penny as it comes free with the *WarBirds 2004* subscription.

ACES HIGH
Not reviewed
A spin-off produced when the original development team behind *WarBirds* fragmented a few years back. Graphically, it's not on a par with *WarBirds 2004*, but the arenas have more than double the number of players at any given time.

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Huge arenas
✔ Accurate physics
✔ Great-looking aircraft
✘ Huge learning curve
✘ Arenas seldom very busy

75
The few, but growing

FAR CRY

MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Crytek | ETA: Out Now |
www.farcry-thegame.com | Players: 2-16
REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

Will Porter goes into the jungle one last time

It's a sniper's game at the end of the day.

Camouflage was never Jack's strong point.

Small teams work best.

I MAY never have fragged in such a beautiful environment before, but unfortunately *Far Cry* multiplayer falls short of its solitary exploits. Its main thrust, Assault mode, is spiritually akin to *Enemy Territory* – one team must accomplish three objectives in succession, while the other runs around in a panic trying to stop them.

It's all good fun, but doesn't get near the standard of the games it tries to ape. Long-distance firefights make solo *Far Cry* exceptional, but here it just feels off-kilter. Too often, experienced players just lie in perfect cover, making life hell for non-snipers and seriously damaging the flow of the game. Meanwhile, the levels may be huge but this means you rarely feel part of a team – as you do in the closer quarters of, say, *Counter-Strike*. Even if you do stick together, it's often a fool's errand because there's twice the likelihood of being picked off. Vehicles, too, are an easy target and a wasted commodity.

There's some magic, though. Every now and then the glare of the sun reflects on an opponent's gun, for example, and you notice an otherwise hidden assailant.

Some of the forts and bases meanwhile, are impeccably designed. While the game doesn't befit massive 16-player deathmatches, with five players duking it out on a reasonably sized map, the core tenets of *Far Cry* are exposed and there's fun to be had. With modding, this has potential to be huge, but until then it's patchy at best.

PCZONE VERDICT	
SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE	93
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	73
Worth a spin, but flawed	

Batsphinx shredded Snooze.

Will shows Suzy a thing or two about pain.

PAINKILLER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Dreamcatcher | Dev: People Can Fly | ETA: Out Now |
www.painkillergame.com | Players: 2-16
REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband connection

MULTIPLAYER

Like a bat out of hell, *Will Porter* will be gone when the morning comes

PAINKILLER is a mindless barrage of violence, and in single-player this is its selling point. It's a vent through which anger and frustration can be funnelled, while keeping your gameplay arm steady with clever level design and a degree of variation.

The multiplayer game tries a similar angle, tying itself to old-skool frenetic shooters like *Quake*, but somehow doesn't make enough of itself to gain anything but the occasional online follower. It's fast and it's mental, but with only six maps on offer it's a limited package. Also, those maps are fairly basic, despite a few nice ideas such as the reflective windows scattered around that enable you to warp to the action quickly.

It gets repetitive very quickly and isn't a patch on the similarly veined combat in *Quake III Arena*. Greater interest is gathered by the People Can Fly mode, which only records damage when your opponent is in mid air, but even this wears thin. When the developer came up with the Voosh mode, which switches your weapon every 30 seconds, it must have been aware the bottom of the barrel was fast approaching.

It isn't psychologically damaging to play *Painkiller* online: it's mind-numbing in a good way, but it's also thoroughly out-shot by most other games on the market.

Lacklustre maps are hellish (*Fired – Ed*).

PCZONE VERDICT	
SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE	83
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	60
Functional but painless	

SAS: INTO THE LION'S DEN V1.1

SIZE 361MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2003*

www.sas.jolt.co.uk

TOTAL CONVERSION

PCZONE Z CLASSIC

Tony Lamb digs out his Cam-cream

SAS follows the now well-trodden formula of the good guys vs bad guys team deathmatch. This may make it very easy to get into, but don't assume that it also makes it average. The gameplay might be familiar, but the slick manner of its execution puts this mod head and shoulders above the rest of the pack. In fact, *SAS* excels in all areas. Weapons models are top class, player skins highly detailed, sounds suitably atmospheric, stamina system well implemented and animations good too (although I did wonder why so many of our soldiering elite walk like a visit to the crapper is woefully overdue).

The only weak point is that one or two of the maps lack finesse, but even this is nit-picking because the rest are superb, with a wide variety of locations skilfully designed and brought to life. The team have really invested some time and effort here.

"Anyone seen an embassy?"

However, *SAS* isn't a slavish realism mod (à la *Infiltration*, say), although it's definitely hovering at that end of the scale. For example, bullets kill (a lesson you'll learn painfully quickly) and running will ruin your aim until you catch your breath. Best of all though is that you don't have to earn cash to buy different weapons – you can choose your firepower from the word go.

All in all, a top class mod. And there's a *UT2004* version on the way too…

At least it's not purple flour. That would be really upsetting.

PCZONE VERDICT **90**
'Ard as nails

"Still think balaclavas are for kids?"

HEAT OF BATTLE V0.31

ON THE DVD

SIZE 45MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Call Of Duty*

hob.mikesmarauders.com

Tony Lamb is cooking with gas

TOTAL CONVERSION

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

More like the 'chill' of battle here.

He's feeling the heat (*Fired – Ed*).

GIVEN A massive 94 per cent score in our review, WWII fragfest *Call Of Duty* is the absolute nuts and deserving of the number two spot in our A-List. *Heat Of Battle* is the pick of the mods currently available for the game, and is stuffed full of good ideas and trick features to keep any fan happy.

Described as a 'teamplay' mod, the idea behind *HOB* is to promote co-operative play and reduce the temptation for individual glory seeking. Running off on your own won't capture any objectives or score many points, it'll probably just get you killed. This is most evident in the frequent need for more than one team member to be present when a capture-point is taken. If you're on your own, you just can't do it.

Heat Of Battle features a number of well-crafted and enjoyable maps. All are good looking, with the varied environments – snow, a village, a city – vying for your attention. This is a semi-realism mod, with good player skins, neat weapon models and a variety of objectives including Capture and Bomb. Also, you won't find any crosshairs here and bringing your weapon aim to the target takes real skill.

Ultimately, *Heat Of Battle* is a classy mod, but limited in server support. The dependency on teamplay may be the only the thing holding this back from a wider audience, but if you do find a good server, it's well worth the effort.

PCZONE VERDICT **84**
Time to leave the kitchen

HALF-LIFE RALLY V1.1

SIZE 48MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
www.hlrally.net

TOTAL CONVERSION

Put the pedal to the metal with *Tony Lamb*

Gordon Freeman's no Colin McRae, but at least he smiles.

Plenty of car options are on offer.

SINCE IT first lit up the world of first-person gaming, *Half-Life* has been sadly lacking in usable vehicles. The few on-rails transports that popped up obviously weren't enough for the *Half-Life Rally* team who have taken the existing *HL* engine and gone crazy with the spanners until – hey presto! – they had a rally-driving mod. This hasn't been easy (we first saw an alpha version two years ago), but the end result is well worth all the hard work.

Now released as a beta, *HL Rally* is an absolute scream. It's a huge challenge too, as these cars aren't just fantastically good looking – they're hellishly difficult to control as well. Gone are the housebrick-like handling issues and binary steering problems, replaced by the need to master and balance accelerator and brake. Power-sliding doesn't work, it's all about careful use of the controls and gentle tweaks rather than ham-fisted thrashing. Unfortunately, the cars can't bump into each other, so you can't punt an opponent off the course (shame!). However, you can buy bits to upgrade your car and just overtake them instead.

The courses are simple but well designed, and quickly put your skills to the test. Race types include the familiar time trial A to B, circuit racing and Grand Turismo (which is the same as circuit racing, but on tarmac). As far as we're concerned, it's been two years well spent.

PCZONE VERDICT 82

Gentlemen, start your engines

FAR CRY CTF MOD

SIZE 36MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Far Cry*
farcry.action-arena.com

MODIFICATION

Tony Lamb goes flag hunting

It still looks just as good.

Flags. The saviour of many a game.

FAR CRY is without a doubt the coolest-looking FPS on the shelves right now, and the best solo gaming thrash since *Half-Life*. The AI is fiendish, the environments pant-wettingly gorgeous and the wealth of things to kill and blow up simply wonderful. But so far the multiplayer game hasn't quite lived up to its single-player sibling. The maps are too big and without a server of near Herculean proportions you can't get enough people in the game. Plus there's been no Capture The Flag game types either – until now.

What the CTF mod therefore does is simply add that particular game mode to the menu, along with four suitable maps. These are much smaller than most *Far Cry* environments, meaning that fewer players are needed to get the blood pumping. The maps are broadly similar, with each based on a single or small group of islands. Boats and land vehicles feature too, the former being a far more practical option as the 4x4s are far too cumbersome. One map is set at night, so action here will almost always come as a surprise. Another has a set of sniper towers that make movement on the ground dangerous at best. They're simple maps, but functional.

More maps will no doubt be added over time – many reflecting the favourites of online stalwarts like *TFC*. For now, this is the only choice. It's limited for sure, but at least it's a start.

PCZONE VERDICT 68

It's just Cry-ing out for more maps

COMMUNITY CHEST
MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR

Dan Emery gets his chocks away with the ultimate simulation series

The *Microsoft Flight Simulator* series is the longest-running game of all time. The first version came out way back in 1982 and was advanced enough to meet FAA regulations. No small feat considering that PCs back then were marginally slower than a clockwork snail. Since then, there have been ten different versions, with the latest – *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004: A Century Of Flight* – hitting the shops last year.

With so many different sites dedicated to the series, it's been a huge job trying to find the top eight – simply because so many of them are superb.
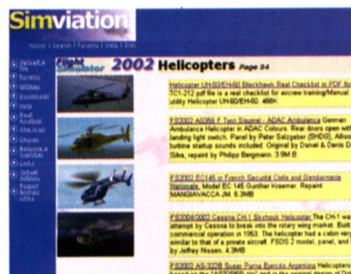
SIMVIATION
(AIRCRAFT)
www.simviation.com

Almost every conceivable aircraft, from every nation and every year is available from this site. If that's not enough, they've got nav aids, wind slip calculators, fuel usage tables and more utilities than you can shake a (joy)stick at. The download section is well laid out, with a good description and reasonable screenshots.

VATSIM
(ATC UTILITY)
www.vatsim.net

We're not sure if this is incredibly clever or incredibly sad – probably both. Vatsim is a worldwide air traffic control system with 1,000 virtual pilots globetrotting at any one time. Of course, if pushing tin is more your bent, you can take control of any airport in the world, from a Australian dirt strip to the vast hubs of Europe and America.

SIM HARDWARE
(HARDWARE)
www.simhardware.co.nz

Some people take everything to the nth degree. Not content with having a screen that looks almost like the real thing? Then why not build a real-world environment that looks like the inside of a 747? Radios, ACCIS, Mip drivers – this site's got the lot for sale. What's more, they all plug straight into the back of your PC. Nice.
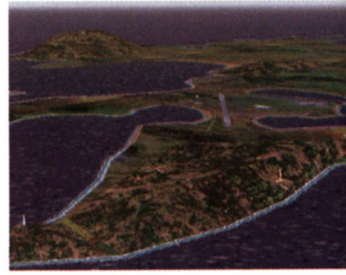
PROJECT AI AFCAD
(UTILITY)
afcad.projectai.com

This is a freeware CAD program that allows you to modify the invisible maps of airports and other data that ATC uses to give directions and AI uses to move around and park at airports. It also controls the information that you see on the 'map view', GPS screen, flight planner, and more. An essential modder's tool.

FS DOME
(WEBSITE)
www.fsdome.com

This site doesn't just offers aircraft and scenery, but also lots of sound files. You'll find aircraft, helicopter and dynamic sound arrangement. The only downside is that it's sorted by category, not version, so you can end up trawling thorough dozens of *FS2004* files trying to find something that's *FS2000*-compatible.
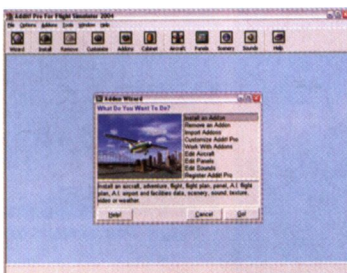
ADDIT! PRO
(UTILITY)
www.byteforge.com

This comprehensive add-on manager lets you install, manage and remove aircraft, adventures, flight plans, AI data, scenery, sounds, videos, weather and more. All the files are archived to the Addit Pro's File Cabinet and can be used to modify aircraft, panels and sounds as well as automatically updating the Scenery Library.
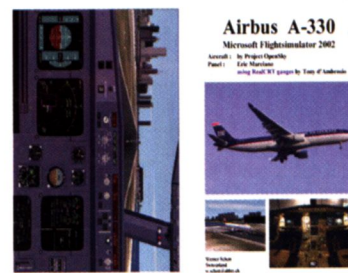
WERNER SCHOTT MANUAL CHECKLISTS
(PRINTOUTS)
www.freechecklists.net

This site's got over 100 different manual checklists in PDF formats for both student pilots and *Flight Sim* addicts. It covers everything – pre-takeoff, taxi, takeoff, climb, cruise, descent and landings – and they're all based on the real thing.
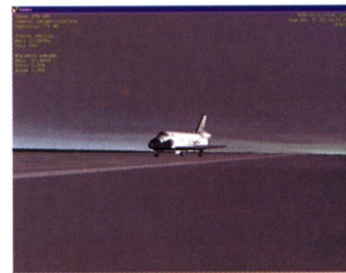
SURCLARO
(WEBSITE)
www.surclaro.com

One of the largest collections of downloadable files for *Flight Sim*, this covers everything from vintage aircraft, special effects and frame-rate enhancers to space exploration modules. There are also a number of science fiction aircraft, an anathema to flight sim purists, but a damn sight more fun to fly than a Cessna.

STEVE HILL'S
NeverQuest

Steve Hill gets more buck for his bang in Deer Hunter 2004

MUCH like alcoholism, incest and snooker, shooting animals for fun is a pursuit enjoyed by both the extreme upper and lower echelons of society. The latter element concerns us here, as unless any members of the royal family have snagged themselves a copy of *Deer Hunter 2004*, it's gun-toting redneck action all the way. This is confirmed by the theme tune, a rootin' tootin' slice of duelling banjos and screeching violins. You can almost hear the accompanying chime of ring-pulls being removed and tobacco being spat: "Cletus, we're gonna bag us some deer…"

We certainly are, and Northern Kansas is the destination. Cunningly assuming the moniker Skeeter Hill, I've infiltrated a hunting party with the express intention of slaughtering innocent four-legged creatures. I'm joined on the sortie by a bunch of good ol' boys, including RedDog and NightHawk, although I'm not entirely convinced by the redneck credentials of either Derek or Dad.

FISHY ON A DISHY

One man who does convince – and slightly scare me – is the subtly named 'Kill Every Thing', and he seems an ideal choice to buddy up with. Not quite the friendly camping vibe, it's a case of trying to keep up with him as he embarks on a killing spree. Before I've even had a chance to introduce myself, he's up to his knees in the river decimating the marine life. I've heard of shooting fish in a barrel, but shooting fish with a double-barrelled is clearly the way forward.

I have a go myself, and it's a mildly satisfying experience, if somewhat unchallenging. More fun is spiking the hapless fish with the Barbarian Crossbow, although the way they float to the surface is somewhat perturbing, and their dead eyes haunt me now, like Tony's visions of Pussy in *The Sopranos*.

Impromptu fishing aside, our main business is bucks, does and fawns. Woodland is their natural habitat, and with several acres to traverse, Kill and I take to our trusty steeds, electing to hunt the bastards down on horseback. There's a certain amount of snobbery within the hunting fraternity, with the more 'real-ale' on-foot hunters content to smear a tree with musk of doe and retire to a suitable vantage point for an hour. I did attempt that approach, but having found myself sat up a tripod with a Frenchman called Derek blowing on a bugle, I decided that it wasn't for me.

My good buddy Kill clearly feels the same, and we set about our task with gusto, more akin to a pair of cowboys corralling cattle than stalking deer. The fresh air is certainly welcome, and getting into a gallop is a liberating feeling, the antithesis of trudging round a dungeon with a magic staff.

THERE THERE MY DEER

This is scant consolation to the doomed deer, as Kill appears to have the scent of blood in his nostrils. Dismounting in the distance, he cracks one off and is greeted with a message of congratulations: "You just bagged a 262lb Typical Whitetail Buck! The antlers score 119.079 points." What is this, the Olympics? If it is, then Kill is going for gold, mowing down a family of deer within minutes. An impressive feat, but it does mean that he's reached his bag limit, a

Deery, deery me.

constraint "carefully set to control and protect animal populations, for the benefit of all hunters". Shucks, it's heart-warming stuff.

WHO KILLED BAMBI?

The onus falls on me, and with Kill effectively out of the shoot, he acts as a scout – not through any particular camaraderie, but more to vicariously sate his bloodlust. Alerting me to the presence of a large buck, in a barely-concealed attempt to show off I pull out my tripod and clamber up

the ladder to survey the surroundings, just in time to see the buck casually amble into the fog.

"Don't bother with the tripod," reprimands Kill. "Just shoot from the heart!" Resisting the temptation to shoot him, or indeed his horse, I follow his directions to where a small fawn is grazing, a Disney-like vision of nature's beauty. Fixing the delicate creature in my crosshair, Kill is screaming at me to "Shoot it!" I squeeze the trigger and the kick-back jerks the view skywards, returning to the horizontal to spot the little fella scampering to safety, a sight greeted with a confusing mixture of disappointment and relief.

With Kill patently disgusted by my performance, I spot movement in the undergrowth and give chase. Gaining on the quarry, I leap from my horse like a jubilant Frankie Detorri and take aim. There's no emotion this time, and with a single crack of the rifle, death is swift. Rushing to the scene of the crime, I survey the corpse: black and white and red all over. "Cletus, I bagged me a skunk…" **PCZ**

Whatever the animal, you too can bring it to an abrupt end in Deer Hunter 2004 by pumping its soft little body full of metal. What better way to spend an evening?

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You will be able to view your subscription details online at www.subsinfo.co.uk

JOYLESS WIRELESS

■ HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand

▲ Whenever I see them, I pester my folks to get broadband. They use the Internet regularly, are close to their telephone exchange and are always squabbling over phone bills with raised voices and highlighter pens. For no more than £15 a month, they could get a 'reduced bandwidth' product and never again have to endure that stressful, cost-per-minute anxiety you get when using a modem.

To my surprise they signed on the dotted line last week, but far from being relieved, it dawned on me what I'd let myself in for. For starters, cables are nasty, unsightly things. Messy bachelors can get away with 20m of CAT-5 snaking across the landing, but such disorderliness is not tolerated in households where a lady is at the helm. So it had to be wireless, and the Belkin F5D7630 combined router and DSL modem for £64.99 from DSL Warehouse seemed like a good deal.

If you're wondering why I'm telling you all this, all is about to come clear. In past columns, I've made the point that, while many of you may see me as the consummate professional able to sidestep any problem with the grace of experience, technology can get ugly with anyone and at any time. Within ten minutes, the Belkin network cards had me leaning inside the case and barking at the motherboard like a drill instructor: the first card I tried wasn't showing up in Windows, and the second caused the machine to reboot endlessly. I was on to a loser.

DSL warehouse credited me for the two cards, and I went for KCorp hardware from scan.co.uk instead. With the cards arrived, unpacked and inserted, the machine wouldn't power up – not even a chirp from the hard drive. So another RMA and another credit later, I decided on an external US Robotics 802.11g Ethernet bridge. It's not the most elegant solution, and at £46 is roughly twice the cost of a PCI card, but it works a treat. Quite often, even the best of us have to buy ▼ our way out of trouble.

Double Vision

Multiple next-generation video cards on one motherboard? Alienware's got the know-how...

ALIENWARE HAS COME up with a way of slotting two PCI-Express video cards into the same motherboard, and supposedly without the need for specialised driver tweaks or software patches. Called Video Array, the technology will be available exclusively in the company's upcoming ALX product range and is set to raise the bar for benchmarks.

A twin video configuration brings back memories of Scan-line Interweave Voodoo cards, where identical boards were 'piggybacked' with one another, and each board took it in turns to draw alternate lines of the image. When launched in the late 1990s, doubled-up SLI Voodoos were the fastest things on the market, but were prohibitively expensive and plagued with problems (the biggest hitch being the arrival of the GPU). Even the almighty Voodoo5 6000, which featured four VSA-100 processors and cost close to £600 ended up on the discard pile and was the last thing 3Dfx ever did.

"The technology offers an impressive speed boost, and at a predicted price of more than £600 we wouldn't expect anything less"

In ALX, the workload is distributed between the twin cards, but Alienware has a patent pending on the process and it's not known how the sharing actually works. What the company has publicised is the fact the technology offers an impressive speed boost, and with a predicted

It's not clear how it works, nor how effective it will be, but two monster video cards working in parallel should prove interesting.
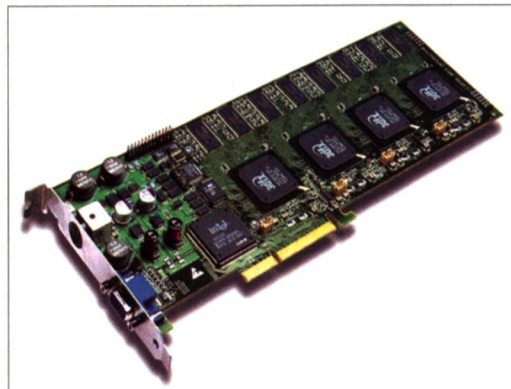
When it was launched, the amazing Voodoo5 was the best way to impress your mates.

price of more than £600 we wouldn't expect anything less. Just don't go expecting two engines delivering twice the power – although you'll notice the difference, parallel systems (eg dual processors) don't provide that sort of yield.

"Alienware has dedicated significant resources into our research and development team, focused on technology and innovation," says Humberto Organvidez, executive VP and CTO of Alienware Corporation. "Our goal is to set the standard for all other performance-based PC manufacturers to follow." With other ALX range benefits including water-cooling and factory overclocking, my suggestion would be to get saving now. Available within the next few months in the USA, you should be able to buy one in the spring of next year. www.alienware.co.uk
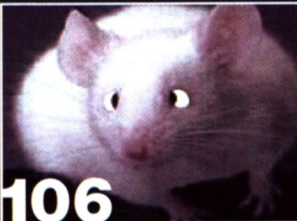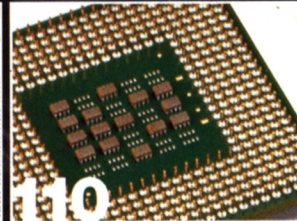
ATHLON PIN UP

New Athlon processors could reclaim the top spot for AMD

AMD launched its redesigned 939-pin Athlon 64 3500+, 3800+ and FX-53 processors at Computex 2004 in Taipei. The new pin count will be partnered by the appearance of PCI-Express and 6.4GB-per-second memory bandwidth from dual channel unbuffered DDR – the move from registered RAM will improve performance and cut the cost of gaming rigs. And while new Athlons have reduced cache onboard, they have a significantly faster
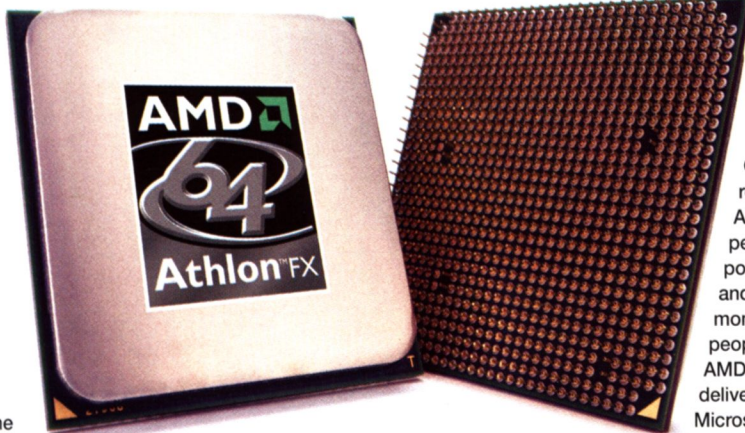
AMD has changed the packaging on its high-end chips to take advantage of dual channel RAM.

HyperTransport bus to compensate.

For a brief period in the spring, AMD overtook Intel in desktop sales. Consumers were buying record numbers of big Athlons, wowed by the performance and potential of the 64-bit chip, and the new 939-pin monsters can only fuel people's enthusiasm. The AMD engines should also deliver significant gains when Microsoft releases the 64-bit version of Windows, so don't be surprised if AMD manages to put Intel's nose out of joint this autumn.

Flat Out Fast

Super-fast new LCD panels perfect for games

ONE OF THE FACTORS deterring you from chucking out your old CRT and buying an LCD replacement is the business about response times. The majority of large flat panel screens on the market offer a response of 25ms or more, and that's too slow for action titles and action films. A sluggish screen is fine for most tasks, but it's distracting in games like *Desert Combat* and *UT2004*.

Luckily though, all that's about to change. Philips has just launched a new 19-inch LCD screen with a 12ms response time, and ViewSonic, Samsung and BenQ are set to follow suit within a matter of weeks. Some existing high-end products such as ViewSonic's beautiful VP201s are already reaching 16ms and are perfect for deep-pocketed gamers, but with 12ms sure to become the accepted standard for all future gaming products, the issue of response times will be a thing of the past by this time next year.

With key manufacturers introducing 12ms flat panels, hanging on to your CRT makes even less sense than before.

FEELS LIKE NEW
Banish pesky pests now

Over the last year, I've had all manner of weird and wonderful toolbars, unwanted apps and pop-ups on my machine. They sprout on my desktop, appear like acne in my start menu and even integrate with the browser interface itself.

Last month, I'd had enough. Having perused, downloaded and tested a wide range of anti-virus products, Eset's NOD32 seems like the best solution. It has a fast and familiar interface, works without fuss in the background and doesn't hog resources even while performing a comprehensive sweep. I can also confirm that the stability of my system has improved markedly since making the move too. A very worthwhile £23. www.eset.com

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
Intel	Chipset Software Installation Utility	5.1.1.1002	12-Dec-03	1.4MB	support.intel.com	
NVIDIA	Forceware	4.24	10-May-04	20.2MB	www.nvidia.com	NEW
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.51	02-Dec-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com	
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.96 Beta	04-Feb-04	2.25MB	www.viaarena.com	

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.5	12-May-04	29.7MB	www.ati.com	NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	56.72	01-Apr-03	10.9MB	www.nvidia.com	

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADV HD Driver Update	1-84-40	29-Mar-03	6.5MB	uk.europe.creative.com	
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com	NEW

HYBRID DNA-X

■ £1,799 | Manufacturer: Quantum | Phone: 0870 4000 111 |
www.directfrom.com

TINY POWER

■ £TBC | Manufacturer: Tiny.com | Phone: 0870 830 3285 | www.tiny.com

Two new 6800 Ultra systems get a Wandy workout

GAMING PCs

I'LL GET straight to the point – it's difficult to separate these two PCs, mainly because they both sport spanking new and ridiculously fast 6800 Ultra graphics cards. They both clock over 24,000 marks in 3DMark2001 SE, over 12,000 in 3DMark03, and close on 70fps in *Far Cry* at its highest resolution on maximum detail. No stuttering, no pausing, no annoying seizures. Every object is smoother than prom queen's thighs – it's as though the shapes and textures were being propelled around the screen by a sophisticated alien technology. And oh boy, do you want it.

It's not the raw power that wows you though as much as the possibilities. At 1280x1024, *Unreal Tournament 2004* runs a very stimulating 120fps; add lashings of anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering and the frame-rate remains in three figures and flicker-free. Even with stock clocks, you can crank every setting towards the previously inconceivable and there's no downside to doing so.

64 BITS AND BOBS

These mothers positively thrive on detail and complexity, and for the first time it's clear how *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3* and *Battlefield 2* will ravish your senses. Consider just the mods – the new *Counter-Strike*, the plush remake of *Team Fortress* – and you'll know that, later this year, everything we know is going to turn totally, jaw-droppingly awesome. And before you say it, I've not used

that word in a review before.

Before I soil myself and end up stuck to this seat, let's take a closer (and less emotional) peer at the two systems. Both are based around 64-bit AMD Athlon chips, Quantum going for the 3400+ and Tiny.com for the flagship FX-53. With 2.4GHz on tap, the latter is the faster of the pair, and together with double the RAM, the Tiny.com stretches out a lead in every benchmark. While the gap between them may look big enough to drive a bus through, the real world difference is imperceptible (if you can tell the difference between 125fps and 120fps, do please write in and let me know). And in case you were wondering, these 64-bit chips are quite at home in a 32-bit environment.

The pair are constructed to more or less the same standard, although they trail the Demonite

(p105) for attention to detail inside the case. The Tiny.com machine offers a bewildering array of inputs, including a multi-format card reader and six USB holes compared to Quantum's three – plug in a mouse, your camera and a printer and you're going to need a hub.

TWO PEAS IN A POD

The Tiny also boasts a 200GB HDD (in single-drive configuration despite the presence of a RAID controller), Creative Audigy2 ZS sound and XP Professional. The Quantum hits back with faster PC3500 memory, two 60GB storage bins in striped RAID formation and a 19-inch flat panel screen. Both machines offer DVD writing, a separate DVD-ROM drive and come with a perfectly decent keyboard, mouse and speakers.
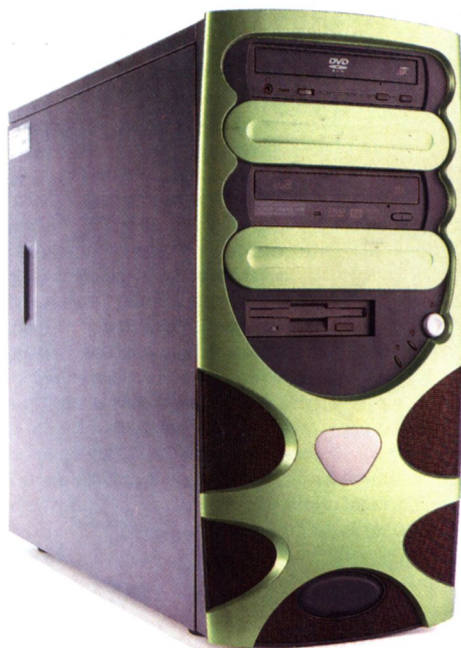
Separating the pair was not easy. Both machines have a 6800 Ultra throbbing away inside them, and both machines run impressively fast 64-bit Athlon chips. They're of identical dimensions and even make the same level of noise. The Tiny.com is quicker than the

Quantum and furnishes you with XP Professional and Microsoft Office, but with more RAM and an FX-53 onboard, it's likely to be more expensive (Tiny has yet to commit to a price but we'd guess around or above £2,000). And where Tiny charges £1/min for support calls, Quantum provides an email address on its website and offers a national rate number for enquiries.

Taking all this into consideration, the Quantum gets the nod. They're both worthy of a recommendation, but the Hybrid is good value, good-looking and a safer bet in terms of after-sales service – a pound-per-minute is too much for support. Not only that, but the modem is inextricably linked to the company's own ISP, meaning if you want to use your existing provider you'll need to… You guessed it, call that support line. If you're comfortable with charges and restrictions, the Tiny worked for me. Just check the terms and conditions before you sign on the dotted line. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

HYBRID DNA-X

✔ Outright power, decent spec RAM
✔ Standard RAID configuration
✘ Lack of USB slots
✘ Warranty

83

A solid and dependable gaming system

PCZONE VERDICT

TINY POWER

✔ Fastest machine we've tested
✔ Card reader/inputs, 7.1 sound
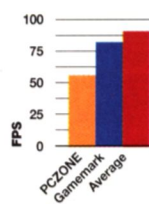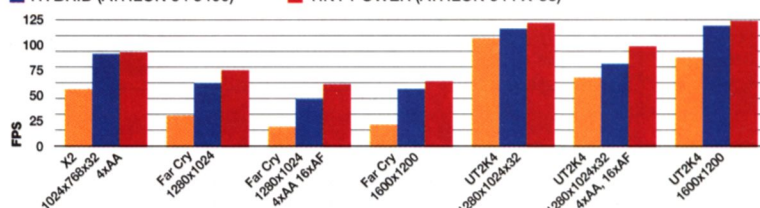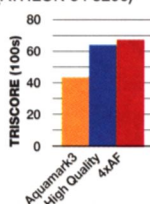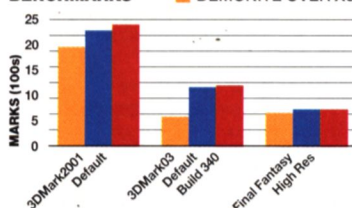✘ Case design screams ordinariness
✘ Warranty

80

Does the job, but read the fine print

BENCHMARKS ■ DEMONITE OVER X64 (ATHLON 64 3200) ■ HYBRID (ATHLON 64 3400) ■ TINY POWER (ATHLON 64 FX-53)

AUGUST ISSUE

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Why buy network cables when your house already has them?

NETWORKING

IT MIGHT sound like a deathwish waiting to happen, but PLC (Power Line Communication) provides you with a home network over your existing electrical wires. With their familiar prongs, you just shove the net2plug modules into any 240V power point and connect them to your PC with the supplied USB cable. It transmits information at 14Mbit/sec, which is slower than Ethernet but still fast enough for your games. Plus, a healthy range of some 200m means it covers all points in your house.

Software installation is an undemanding affair, involving a wizard with huge buttons and plain language instructions: choose a password to secure your network (you don't want neighbours snooping in), select an identifying name for your machine and that's it. Thereafter, a new device sits in your Network Connections control panel and other PCs show up in your Network Neighbourhood. The net2plug modules automatically assign IP addresses to client machines so there's no need to dash around manually configuring machines.

Unfortunately, net2plug isn't walking away with a trophy for its mantelpiece. First and foremost is the price tag. For the same money, you could buy a wireless router and two wireless PCI cards: doing so would allow anyone with a notebook, a games console or even a Palm Tungsten PDA to connect from anywhere in your house and share your broadband (Belkin's F5D7630 combines a DSL modem and 802.11g router for £65). Additionally, wireless variants are now significantly faster than net2plug, meaning if you want to share your data, install applications across the network or backup your stuff centrally, going over the airwaves is your best bet. You also won't be tying up plug sockets. Emerging PLC standards will ramp the speed up from 14Mbit/sec, but for now this is a specialist solution for a diminishing number of people.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Ingenious and effective
✔ Networking doesn't get easier
✘ Wi-fi faster and more flexible
✘ Too pricey

73

A magnificent idea, but slow and pricey

XENO 64

■ £899 | Manufacturer: Demonite | Phone: 0871 222 7222 | www.demonite.com

The red Demon that wants to be an Alien

GAMING PC

DEMONITE'S marketing apes the look and feel of Alienware, and the shape of its latest case resembles a well-known full tower chassis – it's even available in the same dodgy colours. I can't help feeling that a fresher and more indulgent approach to design would have been better, but what do I know? The Demonite brand might be derivative, but it's getting bigger by the hour.

FULL SPECIFICATIONS

AMD Athlon 64 3200+ (clocked to 3400)
Abit KV8-MAX3 uGURU
128MB Radeon 9800 Pro
512MB Corsair Value RAM
160GB SATA HDD
DVD Writer 8x +/-, DVD-ROM 16x
v92 56k voice/fax/modem
10/100 ethernet adaptor
Windows XP Home

And let's get one thing straight: it may look like a copy, but it's certainly no cheap imitation. Nicely presented and seriously tidy on the inside, every cable is fastened back and plumbed out of sight – such attention to detail pleases more than just the eye. The system comes overclocked from the factory, the bus delivering 220MHz with a 10x multiplier for 2.2GHz overall thrust (the standard processor delivers 2.0GHz). Demonite's excellent warranty covers this configuration for five years: three on-site and two return-to-base.

The Xeno 64 falls into the cost-effective performance category in that it combines lesser components in a premium-quality package. The memory sticks might have Corsair's 'Value' stickers on them, and the Radeon may offer 128MB rather than 256MB, but as a complete system it's totally convincing. In benchmarks, it shadows the 3.2GHz Dimension 8300 from a few issues back – the Pentium-powered Dell is not only more expensive but has the benefit of a 9800XT.

The next generation of video hardware is twice as quick as last year's kit, and the benchmark graphs you see are intended to reinforce that fact rather than to do the Demonite down. When you get around to configuring your Xeno system, and I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending it, make sure you choose the baddest graphics card you can afford. It's sure to make a great system even better.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Top notch warranty
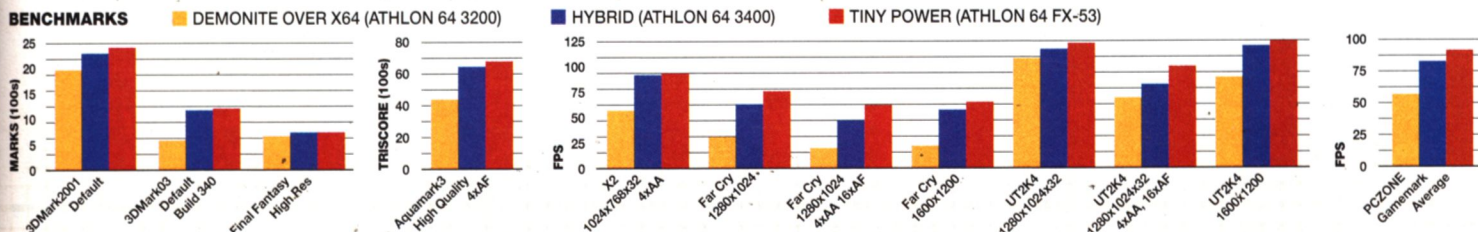✔ Fastidiously tidy build
✔ Arrives overclocked
✘ Awkward case access

91

Premium quality at a very regular price

BENCHMARKS ■ DEMONITE OVER X64 (ATHLON 64 3200)   ■ HYBRID (ATHLON 64 3400)   ■ TINY POWER (ATHLON 64 FX-53)

DEAR WANDY

Spot of bother with your computer? Trouble with your software or can't control your hardware? Write in for expert PC advice. No job too small, no river too deep, no mountain too high…

■ **DR STRANGEGLOVES** Phil Wand

LUCY IN THE SKY

Q Last Christmas I bought myself a brand new PC, a Medion Titanium MD 8080 XL. It's fully loaded with all the hardware I want, and everything was great until I noticed the strangest thing. On some of my games there's a strange light affecting the right side of the screen. I recently changed my monitor and it's still the same. I thought about upgrading my drivers for my graphics card, but when I installed them they renamed my card and I quickly rolled back to the original.

This light bleeding is most noticeable in dark games, such as *Splinter Cell* – I've tried updating *Splinter Cell*, but with no luck. My PC specs are 3GHz Pentium 4, MD-8080 M-ATX motherboard, 512MB PC3200 RAM, 160GB HDD and an ATI Radeon 9800XL. I've attached a screenshot if this helps.

Stephen Toplis

A When I began reading your letter, my initial thought was that you'd managed to place your speakers too close to your monitor. As explained last issue, the image on an old CRT screen is formed from a single beam of electrons which is steered around the glass at great speed using electromagnets; when you introduce an external magnet such as a loudspeaker or a screwdriver, the carefully guided electrons start peeling off in weird directions and produce some trippy effects.

However, then you mentioned a bitmap screenshot, and when I opened it up, I blinked. Quite obviously, whatever's going skew-whiff is inside your Radeon. It's not a loose cable, duff circuitry inside the CRT, nor anything else of that ilk, because hitting the Print Screen key doesn't capture what your eyeballs see (if it did, you could turn the monitor off and produce images of greasy fingerprints).

With this in mind, I have two suggestions to offer. However, both are a bit vague as I've not seen anything like it before.

> ## "Quite obviously, whatever's going skew-whiff is inside your Radeon. It's not a loose cable, duff circuitry or anything else of that ilk"

The first is that your card is defective. True, if the RAM was on the fritz, you'd typically see a repeating pattern such as video noise or coloured squares affecting the whole area. So if it's the hardware, it's going to be something else, but I couldn't honestly say what.

The second suggestion is that it's your drivers. Try disabling any antialiasing or anisotropic filtering you've applied (as *Splinter Cell* may be tripping up over them), and then upgrade to the latest software from the NVIDIA website. Don't worry about your card being renamed: the

I say, that's dashed pretty! Stephen Toplis is seeing this wrapped around the edge of his games.

Not long ago, running a game that looked this good would have had you tied to a ducking stool.

most important thing is you're using the latest official driver. Please write back as I'd love to know what it is!

FAR KIT

Q I used to think I had a fairly up-to-date gaming machine in my Athlon XP 2600+ with GeForce4 Ti and 256MB PC3200 RAM. However, its recent performance in *Far Cry* has demonstrated otherwise, so I'm thinking of an upgrade.

First, I thought of getting a recent DirectX 9 card, but after reading about PCI Express, I realised I might need more. So the question is, when is the new PCI Express hitting the shelves, and along with it the new range of cards from NVIDIA? Also, I'm rather confused about all the different types of memory (DDR, Rambus, dual drive and so on) – and all those numbers after them. Are any new ones coming soon? If not, which RAM configuration has the best performance for games like *Far Cry* and *Half-Life 2*?

Vlad

A Even though it has no set scoring system, *Far Cry* has become the world's most important benchmarking tool – it's one of the few bits of software that enables PC owners to determine the gaming capabilities of their machine in seconds.

If you see hauntingly beautiful vistas, a foaming water's edge, iridescent tropical creatures and textures so real you want to reach out and run your fingers across their abrasions, your computer is faster than a snake strike and will be the envy of all your friends. (However, you should be aware that your friends secretly despise you.) If your head lolls about drunkenly and you experience a nine-second pause whenever you pull the trigger, your computer is crappier than a dose of cholera and that cheap Xbox bundle down at Dixons might not be such a silly idea.

But before you turn your back on PC gaming and hose money on a console, take a look at one of the new Radeon X800 or GeForce FX 6800 cards – a lot of money, sure, but it means a 9800 or 5950 can be yours for even less than you thought (the lowest I've seen is £138 for a 9800 Pro). And unless you want to leave *Half-Life 2* behind – remember, Valve isn't planning on releasing an Xbox port of

"If that doesn't work, change your mouse. I dislike wireless rodents and find their performance in games generally below par"

the game until nearer 2006, and *Far Cry* ain't a patch on the PC version – your money is best invested improving what you already have.

With regards to memory, DDR SDRAM is Double Data Rate in reference to the way that data is transferred twice with each cycle of the clock. DDR200 (PC1600) is 200MHz; DDR266 (PC2100) is 266MHz; DDR333 (PC2700) is 333MHz; DDR400 (PC3200) is 400MHz; faster speeds are available from specialist manufacturers.

DDR-II supersedes it and GDDR-3 – seen in the GeForce FX 5700 Ultra, 6800 Ultra and Radeon X800 – is derived from it. RDRAM is a proprietary memory licensed from Rambus and used by Intel in all its early P4 boards, but PC buyers gave it the swerve and the chip giant dropped support for it around two years back.

I think by 'dual drive' you mean dual channel, a configuration supported by certain motherboards where the available memory bandwidth is effectively doubled. There's no point changing the PC3200 RAM you have, but as already mentioned, you should save up for a spanky new video card instead.

MOUSE TRAP

Q I have an extremely annoying problem with my mouse which has happened throughout the two years I've owned my computer. When I'm playing a game – and this does only happen in games – my mouse starts spinning around beyond my control, clicking randomly. The time this occurs can range from half a second to around five seconds.

It may not seem much, and for games like *Pandora Tomorrow* where you have indirect control of your gun, it provides only a minor nuisance. But in a game like *Far Cry*, where

stealth is crucial and where there's no quick save… Well, think about it!

I've tried visiting the Logitech website for support, but my Explorer just crashes every time I enter the site. My system fits all the requirements and my mouse has changed many a time over the years, but I still have the same problem. I have a cordless optical combo and am running Windows ME.

Sam Jones

A Like so many PC problems, an erratic mouse could be any one of a number of things. What I'd do first is remove all the Logitech tools and utilities that came with your peripherals. You say you can't get to the Logitech site to update them – which is a pretty large problem in itself – and getting shot of the stuff is the next best option.

If that doesn't cure it, change the mouse for a cheap 'n' cheerful wired device with a ball costing no more than a fiver. I have a particular dislike for wireless rodents and find their performance generally below par in games.

If it still does it, you're going to have to look elsewhere. While a reflective or dirty surface can cause random

Logitech's Z-5300 will set you back about £170, but unlike a video card, you'll still be using it four years from now.
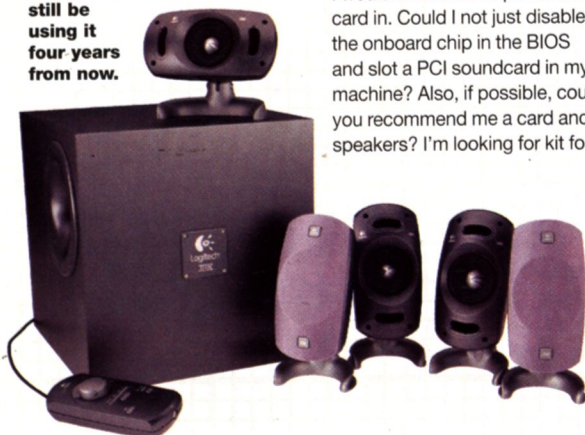
An erratic mouse is a common problem. A cross-eyed mouse is less so.

movements, it's not going to click buttons on your behalf and so we can safely ignore this as a possible cause. No, what's more likely is that you have a deeper hardware issue. I'm aware that early ABIT boards have mouse-related problems, so if you have an ABIT board, ensure your BIOS is up-to-date.

If all that fails, I'd try rebooting into Safe Mode, opening the Device Manager, deleting the mouse from the 'pointing devices' node and then reboot. When all's said and done, the fact you can't get to the Logitech site for a potentially easy fix is indicative of something very wrong with your PC. Have you got a virus and spyware checker?

SOUND ADVICE

Q My Dell 4300 has an onboard sound chip which Device Manager reports as an Intel 82801BA/BAM AC'97 Audio Controller. I'm considering a new PCI soundcard, but recall that when purchasing the machine, the salesman told me I wouldn't be able to put another card in. Could I not just disable the onboard chip in the BIOS and slot a PCI soundcard in my machine? Also, if possible, could you recommend me a card and speakers? I'm looking for kit for

listening to music (mainly) at the best sound quality available.

Daniel Bushnell

A I can think of no reason why you can't simply disable the onboard tunes in your BIOS, drop in the new soundcard and then head back into Windows. Unless the company wants people to tie up helpdesk staff with complaints, it's unlikely that Dell has constructed a system that's impossible to upgrade. Consider that you could run the two cards simultaneously anyway (although this isn't

recommended for home users or old operating systems), and I don't think you've got anything to worry about.

If I were you, I'd go for our Editor's Choice soundcard, the M-Audio Revolution – and pair it with Logitech's Z-5300 set of speakers. It's expensive, but it'll last you a lifetime. Although the damage to your spleen caused by the subwoofer could mean that's only a matter of months… **PCZ**

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com

WATCHDOG

Sunny day, sweepin' the clouds away? Erm, not for this lot. It may be sunny outside, but where some companies are concerned, the skies are forever grey...

■ **TAKING NO PRISONERS** Adam Phillips

US VS UK #1

To iPod or not to iPod: that is the question. And if you happen to come across a Creative Labs MuVO2 1.5GB with a tempting price tag while holidaying in the States, and if you're Salim Damji, then not appears to be the answer. Trouble is, on his return to Blighty the unit went wrong. "I contacted Creative's helpdesk, who were initially very helpful and offered to send a replacement unit," explains Salim.

Creative also agreed on an upgrade to the 4GB version, which of course Salim paid the difference on and thought that was the end of the matter. "However, I later got a message from Creative telling me that as my product was bought in the US, it couldn't do the upgrade as it was a non-European unit – but

"I'm now left with a £200 paperweight with no support or means of getting it repaired"

SALIM DAMJI VENTS HIS SPLEEN

it would replace the unit," recalls Salim. "Fair enough, I thought."

Trouble is, the next day Creative told him that it wouldn't in fact be replacing his knackered unit and that there was no way of getting it repaired either. "The company gave me no explanation of why the position had changed since the day before," fumes Salim. "I've now got a £200 paperweight, with no support and no means of getting it repaired."

Over to Creative: "To clarify, Mr Damji did purchase a US product, which is not strictly covered by the European returns procedure after 90 days (this is the warranty on the US models).

However, our tech support team did accept the unit and verified a hard disk failure (as mentioned in previous mails). An offer of an upgrade to the 4GB version was made

VS

A tough match but reader Salim Damji reckoned the Creative offered a better deal. Until it broke...

to Mr Damji, which he duly accepted."

According to Creative, the fact that the original unit was a US product seemingly confused matters at this stage. "However, this has now been sorted out and Mr Damji has now accepted the upgrade and should receive the new product today." Phew.

US VS UK #2

"Last September, I spent nearly £100 on an M-Audio Revolution 7.1 soundcard," says reader Michael Stout. "Since it wasn't available at any of M-Audio's distributors in the UK, I ordered it from AudioMidi in the States."

Eight weeks later and Michael's card went kaput. He's been told by States-based AudioMidi that it's not its responsibility anymore as he's had the product for over a month – so the company put him in touch with M-Audio in the UK.

"M-Audio in the UK don't want to know because it wasn't bought here and referred me to M-Audio in the States," explains Michael. "M-Audio in the US don't want to know as I live in the UK!"

Oh dear. In response, we trotted off to M-Audio UK. It told us: "Unfortunately, our US and UK companies operate their returns departments in differing ways. In the UK, our

dealer network handles all warranty returns (within the first 12 months)." Once this standard 12-month warranty period has expired, M-Audio's service department takes over. However, in the US, the set-up is different: "30 days after purchase, the responsibility is passed onto the manufacturer, who has to offer the end user back-up and service, and the dealer does not."

As for your situation, Michael, the confusion has probably arisen because you called M-Audio's tech support line and it deduced the card was possibly faulty and still under warranty: "Our tech staff would've asked the customer to return the card to his dealer, in line with our UK returns policy. His dealer in the

Reader Benny Præstegaard's wait for *Vampire Hunter D* (the spin-off of the animated film) was long. Very long.
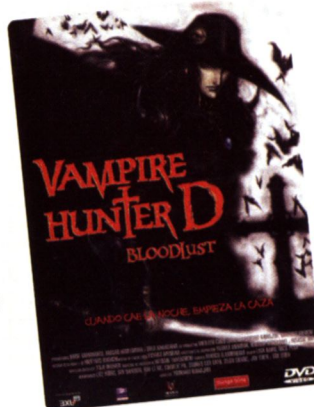
US would then have told him to contact our US office if the card was over 30 days old. Our US office would then have told him that for international returns, he should deal with his nearest office – which is us! As Mr Stout mentions, this leaves him in a predicament." We'd say!

So what about Michael's card? Well, there is a happy ending – while the tech top dog at M-Audio has asked for Michael to call him directly, AudioMidi has been back in touch to help out too.

ONLINE 'ORROR!

Buying online, eh? It can be so good, but sometimes, so wrong. Just ask Benny Præstegaard.

On August 16 2003, Benny ordered *Vampire Hunter D* from Niontour through the Amazon Zshop scheme for £9.99. Niontour promptly took the cash from his account. Sadly, 12 weeks after the initial order, Benny still hadn't received it. To make matters worse, he'd now moved to Denmark. He wrote to Niontour and eventually got a response stating that it was still planning to ship and that the delay was caused by a supplier.

"Only 14 weeks after I ordered, it was on the way... Not!" fumes Benny. "Niontour didn't have my new address, so god knows where it sent it."

He wrote to Niontour again in December demanding his money back, but yet again has heard nothing . So, in February this year Benny dropped Amazon a line to see if it could help him.

Amazon pointed out that although it's not directly involved with any of its Zshops, if there's a problem, buyers may be eligible for an Amazon A-Z Guarantee: "Please know that you must wait 30 days after the closing of a transaction before taking advantage of our guarantee," says the company. "From that point, you have 30 days in which to submit your claim. In this case, I'm sorry to inform you that you have

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ COMPANIES OFFERING GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE ALWAYS DESERVE THE HIGHEST PRAISE – SO HERE'S WHERE YOU CAN NAME AND FAME YOUR FAVOURITES…

(Presumably) ladies man Daz D'Amour wrote in with a rave, not a rant: "My *PC ZONE* arrived last week and the first thing my son and I do is install the free play/indie zone games as they tend to be child-friendly – he's only eight," explains Daz. "This month's game was *Platypus* and my son loved it as it was a simple mouse-controlled blaster."

So happy was he with his kid's contentedness that while perusing his local games emporium, Daz spotted the full version. Being a top dad, he bought a copy – but on his return home, it wasn't good news: "Oh woe was me," cries Daz. "On installation, the game appeared to be an earlier release – and although it's exactly the same game, there was no mouse support!"

Doom 3? Half-Life 2? Pah! *Platypus* is where it's at…

And as his son wasn't dextrous enough yet to use that pesky PC keyboard, a frustrated Daz sent off an email to the games maker's Idigicon late one night and received a reply from the company's IT department. "It contained a link and a password to the updated full version which now resides on my C-drive. The company sent that email at 1:35am, so it was waiting for me when I checked my mail this morning. My son will be delighted."

And what kind of service does Daz reckon Idigicon has provided? "Bloody A1, top notch, no questions asked, keep the customer happy kind of service." And looking at the evidence, we have to completely agree.

▼

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unfortunately missed the 30-day window."

Not a pleasant experience is possibly an understatement – it's been a whopping 37 weeks in fact since Benny first ordered the bloody game. Understandably, he's not too happy with the outcome, so we contacted both Amazon and Niontour to find out what has gone on. Amazon at least was prompt with its response: "It appears that the customer

ordered an item from a Zshop seller with an estimated delivery time of three weeks," says Amazon. "This delivery time was delayed considerably and as a result the customer asked for a refund. It appears that this refund was not forthcoming."

Amazon goes on to restate the 30-day claim period but says that in your case Benny, it's prepared to make a gesture of goodwill and give you a refund. Success! **PCZ**

IN THE DOG HOUSE | WATCHDOG

THIS MONTH, IT'S NOT A COMPANY WHO'S HAVING ITS WRISTS SLAPPED – IT'S WATCHDOG. LET US EXPLAIN…

BAD DOG PCZONE'S WATCHDOG

Issue 142 of *PC ZONE*, 'In The Dog House' featured our take on how the PC maker Poweroid had mistreated customer Graham Tudor and his faulty PC. In an attempt to resolve his issues, we highlighted that we'd sent two emails to Poweroid's customer service which had seemingly been ignored. We also said that we'd tried to call the company, only to end up with its switchboard, with the person on the other end of the line telling us to call back later. Because of this, Watchdog felt that Poweroid had been given more than enough notice to respond to Graham's complaint and thus Poweroid was placed In The Dog House.

However, it seems there are two sides to every story. When Poweroid read our complaints in the magazine,

the company contacted us saying that it had never actually received the two emails from Watchdog.

Further investigation revealed that Watchdog had in fact sent its two queries to the wrong email address. Oops. So, it seems Poweroid is not quite the villain we originally made it out to be.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Stop watching the tennis and buy some stuff! You know that Tim's going to lose in the end anyway...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

◀ EDITOR'S CHOICE ▶ ◀ RECOMMENDED ▶ ◀ ALSO CONSIDER ▶

MOTHERBOARDS

IC7
STREET PRICE £85
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw
Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN on-board. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.

K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)
STREET PRICE £74
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.

875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)
STREET PRICE £105
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent.

PROCESSORS

P4 3.2GHZ
NOW £183 / WAS £193
STREET PRICE £183
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
With the price of the 3.0GHz now well below £200, it makes sense to spend a bit extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.
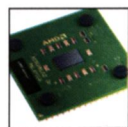
ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB
STREET PRICE £135
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com
No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium – but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.
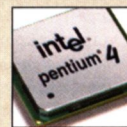
P4 2.6GHZ
NOW £116 / WAS £130
STREET PRICE £116
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
We'd previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.6GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.

HDDS

WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB
STREET PRICE £54.50
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com
The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

RAPTOR 36GB
STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD

RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB
STREET PRICE £153
MANUFACTURER Sapphire Technology
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com
Bit of a no-brainer this one. In what amounts to an AGP swansong, the 128MB version of ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro can now be yours for just £150: high-end punch in a mainstream price bracket. Like the 5900 XT, it's a product from the higher echelons, remarketed to appeal to a wider audience. Unlike the GeForce, it's not been throttled: it's the real deal. Buy one now.
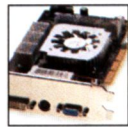
GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB
STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER XFX
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk
The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far out front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want the card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.

RADEON 9800XT 256MB
STREET PRICE £309
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com
With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we gave some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite three hundred quid rattling around in your back pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for *Half-Life 2*, redeemable when the game finally gets released.

SOUNDCARDS

REVOLUTION 7.1
STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk
Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

AUDIGY 2 ZS
STREET PRICE £85
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.

AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO
STREET PRICE £167
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

| ◄ EDITOR'S CHOICE ► | ◄ RECOMMENDED ► | ◄ ALSO CONSIDER ► |

MICE

MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.

OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER AÇTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

KEYBOARDS

INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.

INTERNET KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk
Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.

PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk
If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

JOYSTICKS

CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com
A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.

CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com
A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.

HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk
The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

SPEAKERS

INSPIRE P580 5.1
STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. This latest design includes a headphone jack at last too.
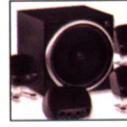
Z-640
STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.

MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SCREENS

CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com
When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.

FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk
This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.
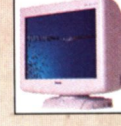
VISIONMASTER PRO 514
NOW £492 WAS £498
STREET PRICE £492
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk
Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and so ideal for gaming.

MP3 PLAYERS

APPLE iPod 40GB
STREET PRICE £400
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk
There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod – and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch too. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.

ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £316
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com
While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.

MUVO 128MB
STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com
The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers) and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.
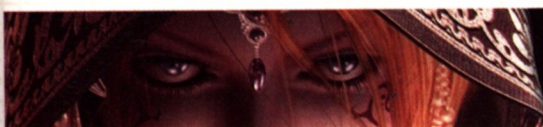
FX5700 MSI MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL www.msi.com.tw
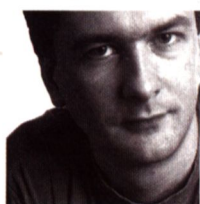
MAILBOX

It's feeling hot in herre (sic), so write us a letter right now. Or take off your clothes if you want...

■ **NOT SUCH A NELLY** Dave Woods
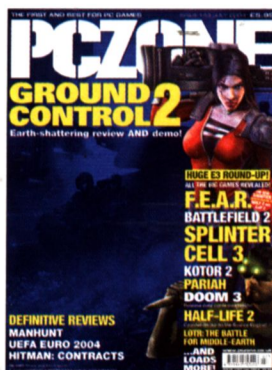
BLOODY MAG

Just thought I'd write in to suggest the inclusion of a safety case for the mag – while reading the last issue, I suffered a nasty deep paper cut, which resulted in me not being able to play games.

Joe Oxley

No pain, no gain is our motto. Has anyone else spilt blood for the *PC ZONE* cause?

BOFFIN

I was reading your article 'Ministry of Sound' (issue 141). For the last few years, I've been teaching my students about producing realistic sounds for applications (including games). Essentially, it's just the same as producing photo-realistic images: you need to calculate what sound will arrive at each ear. If you can then deliver that to each ear, the result is totally realistic. Calculating the sound at each ear (which depends on the angle and distance of the sound, as well as how the sound bounces off any surfaces) simply needs processing power, preferably on the audio card.

Delivery is the problem. You can get amazing results with a good pair of headphones, but it's a bit tricky if you want to hear the phone. Surround-sound can't really compete, although it can produce a 'sweet spot' where the approximation is pretty good – so long as you're sitting in the middle of it.

*Professor Leslie S Smith,
(Dept of Computing
Science and Mathematics,
University of Stirling)*

We've had our best brains working on this for the past few weeks and we think the future is headphone-shaped.

BALL & CHAIN

I've been buying your great mag for over a year now. The problem is I spend so many hours playing your demos and reading the reviews, it's putting a strain on my marriage. My wife thinks I don't spend enough time with her and says I should have married my PC instead. Am I the only man who gets nagged for playing too many games? Hopefully if this gets printed it might persuade her to flick through the mag and see what she's missing.

*Kirk
PS: I love you Kelly xx*

The only man who gets nagged for playing too many games? Wake up and smell the mouse mat.

SHOW ME THE PAIN

I'm coming up to the end of my degree and decided to buy myself a new game, *Painkiller*. Can I just say, it's the shit! If it was a drug I'd be hooked, if it was food it would be meal replacement multivitamin Guinness-flavoured powder. The best thing is the weapons. Most games stick to the same old weapon list, but *Painkiller* is a refreshing change. When are games going to start being a bit more inventive, possibly including a gun that can shoot round corners?

Crazy Man

No doubt as soon as new weapons enter the real-life arena, you'll see them replicated in games. As for *Painkiller's* arsenal – if the military was equipped with the Stake gun, there'd be no need for anything else at all.

GAME OF TWO HALVES

Praise: Super magazine and an enjoyable read. I've been a subscriber since early 2000 and feel *PC ZONE* is the best games mag, period. There are so many positive things I could say about it that I don't know where to start. Almost all the articles are worth reading and I particularly enjoy the retro content.

Complaint: However, why did the recent issue of *PC ZONE* have to include mobile phone ads that were in very poor taste? Surely you risk alienating readers like myself? As a middle-aged man, I face more than enough temptations in my life already and our 19-year old son was not impressed either. It's true that other mags run ads like this (and worse), but surely your job is to occupy the higher ground? Sure, include the odd provocative screenshot, but bear in mind that most of us don't want pictures of real and inflated women facing us as we read about games.

Stephen Rivett

We've got nothing against images of semi-naked women, but we agree they should be represented in an artistic and flattering light (see our E3 report last issue for the proof). We pride ourselves on not accepting ads for sex lines and the like and agree that the offending mobile phone ads were in dubious taste. Rest assured that you won't see any more of them in *ZONE*.

DIABOLIQUE

In your last issue you made a little remark about *Diablo 2*. It may have only been a little bit of a diss, but I'd just like to point out that thousands of people all over the world enjoy the game, a game that I think is ahead of its time. I've been hooked on *Diablo 2* since it came out and it never gets boring – in fact, *Diablo 2* has now become part of my daily routine. So in conclusion, *Diablo 2* = excellent.

Nick Foster

We would never diss a game of the calibre of *Diablo 2*. We acknowledge it's brilliant and that thousands of people play it all the time and even 'include it in their daily routine', along with reading *PC ZONE* and going to the toilet.
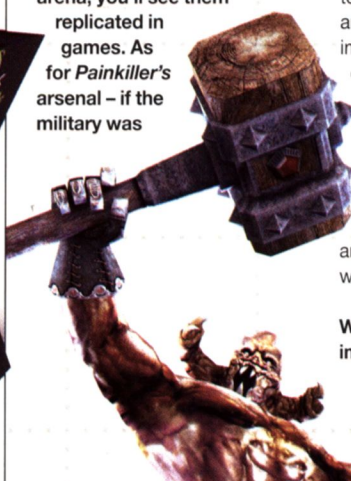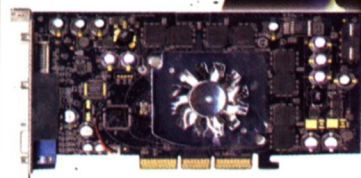
SAM & MAX 1

I'm an adventure game veteran and like many others, was heartbroken that *Sam & Max* and *Full Throttle* were cancelled. I even signed the petition. However, you can't blame

Make sure your game hits the right notes.

Painkiller has some great weapons. Like this dainty thing.

"To get gamers all excited and then disappoint them at the last minute is ridiculous"

PETE HOWE WANTS SAM & MAX 2. NOW

A BREED APART

For the first time in my career as a know-it-all game troll, I find myself driven to write to a magazine, rather than simply browse through it, deriding the opinions therein for being immature, overblown or simply erroneous.

The reason for this is your review of *Breed*. For far too long, I've lusted after this game. I've tried to fool myself that, upon release, I would browse the Net and various specialist magazines for objective and forthright opinion on whether the code passes muster. But I knew that, in my heart of hearts, I would buy it as soon as it was released.

However, two things have recently taken precedence over this egocentric habitual behaviour of mine. I'm getting married in about three weeks, which is obviously a drain on resources. Also, I happened to pick up *PC ZONE*, attracted by the *Rome: Total War* coverage, and noticed the *Breed* review. Five minutes later, I saw the light and, suffice it to say, the plastic is staying firmly in the wallet.

Anyhow, a sense of relief at having dodged said bullet washed over me and a feeling of gratitude towards your publication and Anthony Holden arose. It's then that I thought to do something about this. First, please find enclosed a subscription request for your publication, the five issues for £5 being too generous by half. Second, please find enclosed a cheque for £5 made payable to Anthony Holden: I want to buy him a drink!

I realise that that is the raison d'être of your magazine, to reliably dissect and inform your readers of the dos and don'ts of the PC gaming world. Maybe it's a product of my own good humour at my impending nuptials, but I really do feel the need to do something tangible in thanks for saving me some dough. Keep up the good work, lads and ladettes!

Chris Campbell

We're here to serve. And give free graphics cards out to those who are about to tie the knot and can't afford to upgrade for themselves.

LucasArts completely. Take *Grim Fandango*: a brilliant game, but how did gamers treat it? They didn't buy it. No wonder LucasArts won't commit to another adventure game.

Perhaps it was for the best anyway, as the sequels might have been inferior. At least this way, we're left with the good, untainted memories of the Freelance Police (and Ben). Unless they get put back on track, my next adventure game fix will have to be *Beneath A Steel Sky 2*. Until then, sign the petition, email LucasArts and, if you haven't done so already, go and buy *Grim Fandango*.

Vincent Smythe

SAM & MAX 2

I can't understand the decision to cancel *Sam & Max 2*. How does it benefit the gaming community for LucasArts to stop development when everyone knows it was going really well? Why didn't LucasArts decide adventure games weren't its bag before funding development and announcing the sequel?

It's one thing to say that you're not interested in a target audience or to blame the 'economic climate', but to get gamers all excited and then disappoint them at the last minute is ridiculous. What research was considered before this decision was made? Were gamers consulted? Or was it because it didn't have big guns or anything to do with *Star Wars*?

Pete Howe

We're as disappointed as you (and Will's more disappointed than anyone), but we chatted to the wise folk at Activision, who pointed out that when a game is given the go-ahead, it's on the basis of the market as it stands at the time. Activision wouldn't have announced the game if it'd thought it was going to fail from the off, but it's obviously made the decision thinking that the adventure genre is no longer economically viable. We live in troubled times. PCZ
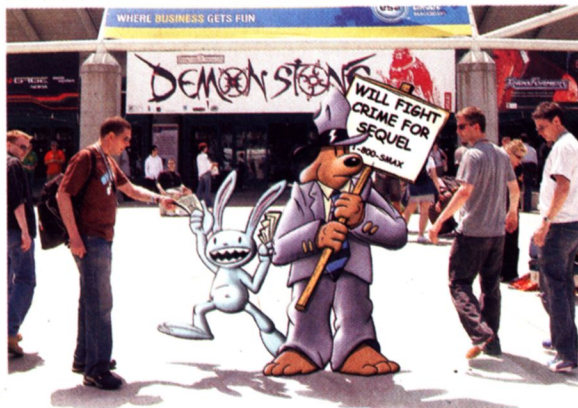
Sam & Max: gone, but not forgotten.

If you read the last issue, you can't have failed to notice our annual trip to E3, the biggest games show in the world. We saw all the games you're going to be playing over the next couple of years and we wrote all about them so you could start getting excited. But which one buttered your toast? **Gilly71** knows the answer.

"The best game for me was *F.E.A.R.* – I was blown away when I saw the screens. There's this bit where a guy is booted, then slow-mo kicks in and you see the guy flying over a rail and straight into an office area, where he lands realistically!" **DeadMartyr** couldn't have been more in agreement. "*F.E.A.R.* is the most exciting for me, and the definition of cool. It's so cool that the car's driver in the video has time to turn and look at you while barrel-rolling over a ramp! The game looks like a winner."

Not everyone's got the *F.E.A.R.* though. "Man alive, I can't wait for *Splinter Cell 3*," chips in **DaveTSutton**. "I can hardly contain myself as my excitement for the third instalment builds up and begins to trickle down my leg. I think I speak for everyone when I say that *Splinter Cell* and *Pandora Tomorrow* are the two greatest games ever made and as long as the level design in *SC3* can match that of its predecessors, I'll be as happy as a clown in a war zone."

He's in a minority, though. **G-Man_007** is looking for scares as well. "*F.E.A.R.* has me the most excited – a great-looking engine and a good idea for an FPS story. If it can be as good and innovative as *NOLF 2*, then I'll be very happy indeed. *Sid Meier's Pirates!* is the one I want most, though. It offers so much from a game that I can't recall seeing before. Hopefully, this will be the pirate game everyone's been waiting for since the *Monkey Island* series and the original *Pirates!*"

Last word of the issue to **randy_beagle** because he agrees with our take on proceedings. "*Counter-Strike* á la Source was the footage that got me going. The coolest thing was the water – it splashed up when you shot it! What more could you want?" ▼ *Half-Life 2* perhaps?

TXTCHAT

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ROBERT DARROCK: "I was looking forward to the first decent adventure for years – what a poor decision to scrap *Sam & Max*."

PAULY K: "How can LucasArts justify canning *Sam & Max 2* when it has such a loyal fanbase? Those crazy plums!"

JOHN MARTIN: "Outrage! That's too tame a word! *Sam & Max* made my childhood."

THOM WILLIAMS: "I remember watching *Sam & Max* when I was ten and I hadn't thought about zombie rabbit tails for ages. Shame on you, LucasArts."

NICK FOSTER: "Please stop making fun of *The Sims*, what's the point? U monsters!"

P SMITH: "I think Dave Woods is a hunk."

AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED

Dear Sirs,

I've been a subscriber to your magazine for the past ten years and have never felt compelled to write to you – until now. I was reading a piece about a new game called *America's 10 Most Wanted*, which has been billed as 'the most talked about shooter of 2004'. In it, you play as Jake Seaver, former Navy SEAL and current Fugitive Recovery agent. The object of the game is to track down America's ten most wanted criminals, including Osama Bin Laden and other assorted terrorists, drug dealers and bank robber types.

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

Apparently, the game is one of the most realistic shooters to date, and uses a mix of first- and third-person perspectives, where the action switches from FPS, to up-close and bloody hand-to-hand combat. Interestingly, the game incorporates real-life news footage from CNN, with voiceover commentary by Dan Rathner, news anchor for CBS. In-game realism has also been maximised by using the stunt team from *The Matrix* for motion-capture footage (including Keanu Reave's stunt double). I think it's disgusting.

Why? Well, why should we track down America's 'most wanted'? Can't they do it for themselves? After all, they did a brilliant job with Abu Hamza, that bloke with hooks for hands and a glass eye, who used to preach terror from a quiet street corner in London until the Americans arrested him on suspicion of jaywalking. Admittedly, he wasn't that hard to find (we heckled him on the way to Sainsbury's once), but that's hardly the point.

CRUNCHY NUT

I nearly choked on my Cornflakes and said to my wife, "whatever next?", to which she replied, "I don't know dear, they'll probably announce a deal with controversial street combo, So Solid Crew, for an original soundtrack to accompany the game." We laughed out loud until I read on to discover with horror that the game does indeed feature

music from So Solid Crew, and that a white label of '*America's 10 Most Wanted*' is going to be unleashed on the UK club scene. We certainly will not be frequenting any of our usual underground clubs until the furor has died down. It's a bloody disgrace.

And then came the real coup d'état. Apparently, the best player to bring back all of the Most Wanted alive will be rewarded with £10,000 in used notes. Ten thousand pounds? Do they think we're stupid? Osama alone is worth at least £25million. What are they going to do, say 'thanks!' or 'gee buddy, you're awesome' and pocket the change? Not while I'm alive they won't.

Anyway, I hope you print this letter because I'd like to point out to every like-minded citizen that the game is on sale on July 23 (from all major high-street retailers and online etailers). I for one won't be buying the game on the July 23, and I will certainly not be placing an order with my local shop in case stocks run out on July 23 because of excessively high demand for the game.

Yours sincerely,
Silas B Tabernacle

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

FAR CRY

A huge leap for PC gaming, *Far Cry* is also an absolute joy to play. With its long-range combat, shimmering shores, impressive enemy AI and seamlessly integrated physics engine, it's the first shooter to show the potential of next-gen PC titles. The narrative may be slightly iffy, but the tension and exhilaration it instils in you makes the battle against the Trigens and their mercenary creators one of the best shooters in years.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140

CALL OF DUTY
Call Of Duty is like the tour de force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear and excitement within you, there is no greater WWII experience.
PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward   **PCZ ISSUE 136**

MAX PAYNE 2
It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy   **PCZ ISSUE 136**

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault's* set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.
PUB EA **DEV** 2015   **PCZ ISSUE 112**

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith   **PCZ ISSUE 122**

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS
Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software   **PCZ ISSUE 71**

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around.
PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes   **PCZ ISSUE 138**

UNREAL II
It takes a special game to beat the gorgeous visuals of *Unreal II*. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice-acting all exude quality too.
PUB Atari **DEV** Legend Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 126**

MAFIA
From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion   **PCZ ISSUE 119**

JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY
The latest saber 'em up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.
PUB Activision **DEV** Raven   **PCZ ISSUE 133**

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
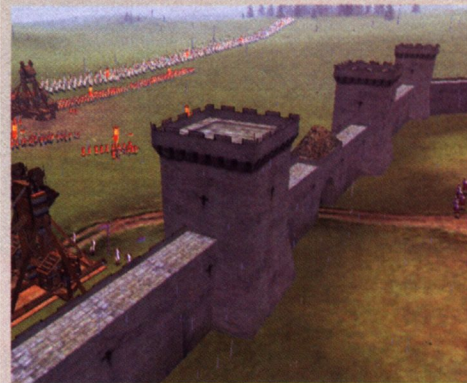
A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.
PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120

RISE OF NATIONS
One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games   **PCZ ISSUE 129**

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 123**

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION
This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.
PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 132**

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES
Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus   **PCZ ISSUE 128**

GROUND CONTROL II
NEW ENTRY Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 143**

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD
The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.
PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 135**

COMMANDOS 2
There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive and preposterously detailed follow-up even more.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio   **PCZ ISSUE 108**

HOMEWORLD 2
The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Relic   **PCZ ISSUE 134**

WARCRAFT III
While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard   **PCZ ISSUE 119**

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, home to the leading lights of the gaming world. The titles listed here aren't just good – they're the cream of the crop, the tip of the top, top of the pops. What's more, each category gets updated every issue, which means you'll only ever find the latest and greatest games here

◄ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ►

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.
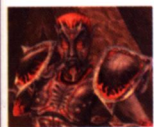**PUB:** Activision **DEV:** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137

DEUS EX
Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm   **PCZ ISSUE 93**

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks   **PCZ ISSUE 117**

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.
PUB Atari **DEV** Bioware   **PCZ ISSUE 118**

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio   **PCZ ISSUE 87**

DUNGEON SIEGE
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games   **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games   **PCZ ISSUE 80**

BALDUR'S GATE II
The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware   **PCZ ISSUE 96**

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm   **PCZ ISSUE 137**

DIVINE DIVINITY
This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay is anything but.
PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios   **PCZ ISSUE 121**

◄ ACTION/ADVENTURE ►

SPLINTER CELL

At long last we've got a new king of the action-adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft   **PCZ ISSUE 138**

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW
Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft   **PCZ ISSUE 141**

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal   **PCZ ISSUE 136**

GRIM FANDANGO
If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts   **PCZ ISSUE 71**

SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT
Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami   **PCZ ISSUE 126**

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE
A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami   **PCZ ISSUE 127**

SOUL REAVER 2
With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics   **PCZ ISSUE 111**

DISCWORLD NOIR
Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it, in our opinion.
PUB Atari **DEV** Perfect Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 79**

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON
It has its detractors, but nobody can deny that the third *Broken Sword* game seamlessly reinvents the traditional point-and-click into the realm of 3D. The dialogue may grate, but it's still well worth a look.
PUB THQ **DEV** Revolution   **PCZ ISSUE 136**

◀ **GOD GAMES** ▶

BLACK & WHITE

Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III
Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111

GHOST MASTER
Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130

THE SIMS
Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87

VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135

SPACE COLONY
Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136

CAESAR III
Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail *Caesar*.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM
This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121

SIM CITY 4
The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ **SPACE COMBAT** ▶

X2: THE THREAT

Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver **DEV** Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER
Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil
PCZ ISSUE 128

X – GOLD
The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

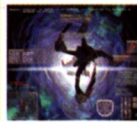**PUB** THQ **DEV** Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS
Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions
PCZ ISSUE 93

FREESPACE 2
Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc
PCZ ISSUE 84

◀ **MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER** ▶

EVERQUEST

EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of seven expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 117

PLANETSIDE
Truly the mother of online battles, *PlanetSide* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 131

EVE ONLINE
Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130

ANARCHY ONLINE
A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 114

A TALE IN THE DESERT
No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis **DEV** eGenesis
PCZ ISSUE 133

◄ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY ►

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2
With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.
PUB Gathering **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 136**

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD
All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 127**

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE
This revamp of H&D removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.
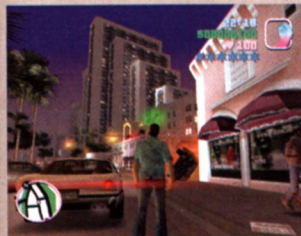**PUB** Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 115**

HOSTILE WATERS
A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.
PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software **PCZ ISSUE 101**

◄ SPORT ►

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04

A fresh season is added to the *CM4* canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 137

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3
Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 136**

VIRTUA TENNIS
Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite **PCZ ISSUE 114**

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3
This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.
PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 98**

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004
Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.
PUB EA Sports **DEV** Headgate Studios **PCZ ISSUE 135**

◄ DRIVING GAMES ►

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North
PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North **PCZ ISSUE 117**

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2
The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters **PCZ ISSUE 142**

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04
More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fourth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With an excellent damage model and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters **PCZ ISSUE 140**

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-addled speed freaks.
PUB EA **DEV** Black Box **PCZ ISSUE 137**

◄ FLIGHT SIMS ►

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, along with more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games
PCZ ISSUE 128

MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT
Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Microsoft **PCZ ISSUE 133**

BATTLE OF BRITAIN
Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software **PCZ ISSUE 103**

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY
A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.
PUB Activision **DEV** Lucasarts **PCZ ISSUE 137**

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT
It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Eagle Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 138**

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The *PC ZONE* DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the *PC ZONE* disc browser and turn the disc over.

BIG BOTHER

DISCWORLD

■ **WORDS & DISCS** Suzy Wallace

▲ You can always tell what time of year it is by the events going on. First there was E3, signifying early May. Now, the glorious British summer has officially kicked off with the Euro 2004 Championships, Wimbledon and, more importantly, *Big Brother*. Despite the social stigma attached, I'll be watching this year – it beats football. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's already provided some moments of respite from defragging my hard drive – and I've been drawn into it just trying to work out who I actually hate the most.

Then I realised that the demos on this month's cover discs could be *Big Brother* contestants. *Chaos League* is the cheeky one with a slightly warped sense of humour and violent tendencies; *Perimeter* is the shy one who erects barriers and who, just when you think you've got to know it, morphs into something completely different; and the E3 movies are the egotistical nightmares, the attention seekers who demand you watch them *now*. Meanwhile, *Hitman: Contracts* is the one who blends stealthily into the group before going for the jugular, while *Söldner* is the rebel with a penchant for destroying its surroundings. It's probably the only time *Söldner* will be compared to a kitten – you read it here first.

On second thoughts though, maybe I should stop here before EA starts getting some new ideas for the next *Sims* expansion pack: *The Sims: Big Brother* (shudder).

▼ Until next month...

You put your left leg in, your left leg out...

CHAOS LEAGUE

CD1/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters **Dev:** Cyanide Studios

Cyanide Studios has filled a gap in the market for violent turn-based sports with the quirky and slightly demented *Chaos League*. It's a title where barbarians rub shoulders with skeletons, and where the cheerleaders are not rosy-faced, blond-haired teenagers but bikini-clad orcs using decapitated heads for pompoms.

In the demo, you get two races – the Barbarians and the Undead – and three championship matches, with a range of tutorials designed to teach you the basics in a flash. Unlike real sport, you earn money by keeping the crowd happy and scoring goals; but just like real football, you can use said money to bribe referees, dope players, or to recruit hooligans to give you the edge in your next match. Oh, and check out the commentary; some of the quips are sure to make you smile.
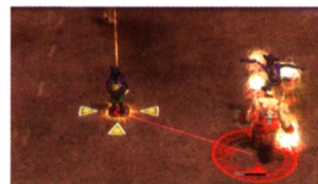

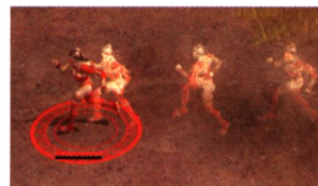The good, the bad and the very ugly.

You go girl!

BUST A MOVE →

AS WELL AS A HEALTH BAR, EACH CHARACTER IN *CHAOS LEAGUE* COMES WITH A BREATH BAR, WHICH GIVES YOU ACCESS TO A WHOLE NEW BUNCH OF MOVES

Master Power
Increases your strength for the duration of a fight, so use it to give you the edge when tackling the ball-holder.

Sprint
Fairly obvious, but also one of the most useful moves of the game if used correctly. Best used for the final sprint to the line.

Fire Up The Crowd
Your character turns to the crowd and gestures at them. The result? Access to powerful spells and traps. Nice.

Smokescreen
Hides your players from the enemy (although they can still see the ball). It also gives some protection against spells.

PERIMETER

CD1/DVD Pub: Codemasters
Dev: K-D Lab **Reviewed:** Issue 142, 81%

MULTIPLAYER

Oooh, look at the pretty lights...

Perimeter came out of nowhere (well, Russia actually, but let's not quibble) and whacked us with its whacked-out take on the RTS genre. We were left reeling, so much so that we gave it an Essential award and sent it packing. We ran the single-player demo a cou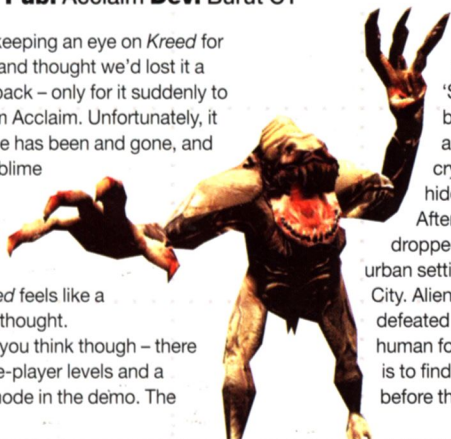ple of months back, but now it's your chance to use your carefully-honed skills in the multiplayer arena, over two maps for up to four players. If you haven't tasted *Perimeter* yet, check out the in-game tutorial, which contains everything you need to know about terraforming, constructing buildings and creating and morphing units.

KREED

EXCLUSIVE

CD1/DVD Pub: Acclaim **Dev:** Burut CT

We've been keeping an eye on *Kreed* for a while now, and thought we'd lost it a few months back – only for it suddenly to reappear from Acclaim. Unfortunately, it seems its time has been and gone, and with other sublime shooters on sale and many more in the pipeline, *Kreed* feels like a bit of an afterthought.

See what you think though – there are two single-player levels and a multiplayer mode in the demo. The first level sees you inside the 'Secret Light Arc', battling aliens in a bid to locate the crystals that are hidden in the complex. After this, you're dropped into a futuristic urban setting called the Holy City. Aliens have nearly defeated the remaining (evil) human forces, and your task is to find the human leader before the aliens do.

The effort to pass the vindaloo proved a step too far.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** IO Interactive **Reviewed:** Issue 143, 72%

He's got no hair and we don't care, because he still packs a punch despite this being his third outing to date. Each one has seen a move to a more console-oriented game, but the series has a bunch of rabid fans and it's easy to empathise with this complete single-player level.

You can either go in all guns blazing, or sneak about for maximum 'Silent Assassin' kudos. To do this, use all of 47's skills – skulking in the shadows, using your syringe or wire for silent killing, stripping corpses of clothes to use as disguises and hiding bodies in areas they won't be noticed. Just don't tell the *Daily Mail*.

47'S WINTER WARDROBE

IF YOU WANT TO GET INTO AREAS UNNOTICED, YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE TOO FUSSY ABOUT YOUR FASHION SENSE. TRINNY AND SUSANNAH WOULD HAVE A FIELD DAY...
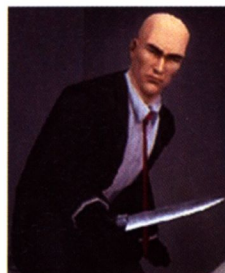
Standard modern-day assassin wear
Featuring extra pockets for your wire and syringes, plus a black tie for any smart dining occasions you may encounter. It's versatile, but it does stand out a bit in Syberia. Get a new outfit, pronto.

Eskimo wear
Now that's more like it. The men and women of Syberia certainly know how to wear fur, and we can only hope no baby seals suffered in the making of the game. The RSPCA are on the case. Matching collar and cuffs too. Nice.

Fuchs wear
One for the slopes, this features a particularly fetching pair of ski goggles and a tightly drawn-up hood. Great if you're an assassin who doesn't want to be spotted. Especially with lots of men with guns around.

E3 MOVIES

CD1&2/DVD

E3 2004 has been and gone. We went, we saw, we conquered and we came back nursing sore heads and armed with all the movies we could carry through customs.

Battlefield 2 was probably the most stunning of all the new shooters, which is why we demanded to get the inside track for our cover this issue. Find out why we're so excited with an exclusive look at the stunning new engine, which points to a much more team-based encounter the second time around.

We've also got more jaw-dropping footage from *Half-Life 2*, a short trailer for the year's biggest RTS, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth*, and we've pulled a few strings to bring you *Run The Gauntlet* – the Ridley Scott Associates short film, in association with Atari. This live action short, previously only to be found on the *Driv3r* website, is based on the story and characters from the forthcoming game, and features husky women and fast cars. We love it!

EXCLUSIVE

Battlefield 2: try not to dribble.

CODENAME: PANZERS

CD2/DVD Pub: CDV **Dev:** Stormregion

Look, it's the Yellow Brick Road!

The Nazi fireworks went down well.

Heal your men at encampments.

CDV loves its wartime strategy. In fact, find a CDV game that doesn't sport tanks, naked Lulas or braindead *Breed*-alikes and we'll send you a prize.

In the meantime, you can sample CDV's latest, a panzer-fest of a demo that sports a tutorial and full mission direct from the streets of Warsaw. There's a Polish officer holed up in town and you've got to smoke him out, keeping an eye out for the enemy troops that're liberally scattered around. Cool touches include the flamethrower that you can use to heat up tanks until the men inside are forced to flee or roast alive. You can also take over abandoned enemy guns and tanks, and call in planes and heavy artillery to deal with any stubborn resistance.

A Lada? Now I'm insulted.

Keep still. This may hurt a bit.

SÖLDNER – SECRET WARS

CD2/DVD Pub: JoWooD/Big Ben Interactive
Dev: Wings Simulations

How do you know when a game is truly massive? When every Tom, Dick and Harriet tries its best to copy it – and *Battlefield 1942/Vietnam* has got pretenders crammed in the wings. This is the latest, an online shooter where you can engage with up to 32 players across three different game modes: Conquest (like Capture The Flag), Team Deathmatch and Hostage Rescue, where one team holds hostages and the other tries to rescue and escort them to a target area.

PLUS: THIS MONTH'S GAME THAT CHANGED THE WORLD – *COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES*, PATCHES FOR *UT2004* AND *TOCA RACE DRIVER 2*, A MOVIE OF *F.E.A.R.*, AND LINKS TO THE CONTENTS OF *COMMUNITY CHEST*

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON *PC ZONE*'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 98. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX


Get high the *Tribes* way.

Evil Genius. Muhaha!

E3 SPECIAL

DVD-VIDEO DVD

You probably didn't get to go to E3, but now you can recreate the world's biggest game show from your own living room. Just stick this month's disc in your DVD player, turn the volume up and trudge around your living room for eight hours a day while occasionally sneaking a peek at your widescreen TV. For added authenticity, try to round up a few fat mates to block your path and lay down some heavy body odour. There's a whole 1.5GB worth of E3 footage to keep you going, including four E3 movies (see p121), plus all-new footage from *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Medal Of Honour: Pacific Assault*, *Evil Genius*, *The Sims 2*, *Men Of Valor*, *Fahrenheit* and *Leisure Suit Larry*. Sit back and enjoy!

EXTENDED PLAY
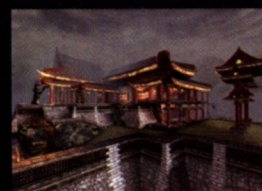
DVD

You might not like *The Sims*, but there's no denying their popularity. Because of this, in a fit of insanity we've decided to bring you the first in what's guaranteed to be a rash of new releases for the 3D sequel. *The Sims 2 Body Shop* and *Starter Creation Pack* enable you to create your own customised friends and family, with a wide choice of clothes, hair and more. You can use these in the game when it's finally released, but until then you'll just have to look at them. Or talk to them.

Back in the real world, we've also got volume one of the *Community Bonus Pack* for *UT2004*, voted best shooter currently playing online in our Supertest (see page 74). It's got 21 new maps, four new characters and a new mutator – something for everyone.

MODS OF THE MONTH

DVD

This month, we bring you the fantastic *Infiltration* for *UT*, stick *Call Of Duty* in a modern-day setting with *Revolt* and send you to the Wild West with *Law Dogs*. Plus, you can play Liberty City with all the *Vice City* extras in the fantastic *GTA: Liberty City*, and keep the *Quake* name alive with *Generations Arena* for *Quake III*.

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The *PC ZONE* DVD is double-sided. Flip it over and you'll find The Essential Selection, which gives you the ten best demos of the last year (including *Far Cry*, *Max Payne 2* and *Perimeter*), the five mods of the month, plus an exhaustive library of patches, drivers, utilities and modding tools. Everything you need to make your mates dead jealous, in fact.

ALSO ON THE DVD... DEMOS OF *STRENGTH & HONOUR* AND *DR LUNATIC SUPREME WITH CHEESE*; THIS MONTH'S INDIE ZONE GAME, *ART IS DEAD*; MOVIES OF *WARHAMMER ONLINE*, *REPUBLIC COMMANDO*, *THE WITCHER*, *THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS* AND *YOU ARE EMPTY*; PLUS A LOAD OF MODS: *HALF-LIFE RALLY*, *AIR POWER* (FOR *UT2004*), *BATTLEFIELD EMPIRES* (FOR *BF1942*), *HEAT OF BATTLE* (FOR *CALL OF DUTY*), AND *FAR CRY CTF*

ON THE CD **ON THE DVD** ● GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

COMMANDOS:
BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Six years ago, an unknown Spanish games studio completed an incredibly difficult mission – to make a truly original game. *Sam Kieldsen* goes back behind enemy lines

GAME: Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER: Eidos
RELEASED: July 1998
INFLUENCED: *Commandos* was a startlingly original game that combined elements of real-time strategy, puzzle and stealth games. It's directly influenced titles like *Desperados* and *Star Trek: Away Team*, and features such as distracting enemies and hiding bodies have been picked up by many sneak 'em up games.

PROFILES

Madrid-based Pyro Studios was founded in 1996 by Ignacio Pérez Dolset and his brother Javier. The company's first project was *Commandos*, for which the duo enlisted the talents of Gonzo Suárez, a 12-year veteran of the industry. Gonzo led development on *Commandos, Commandos: Beyond The Call Of Duty* and *Commandos 2: Men Of Courage* before upping sticks in 2002 to start up his own company, Arvirago Entertainment.

NAME: Gonzo Suárez
ROLE ON COMMANDOS: Project leader and creator
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *Goody* (Opera Soft, 1987)
WHERE IS HE NOW? Overseeing development of *The Lord Of The Creatures* at Arvirago.

NAME: Ignacio Pérez Dolset
ROLE ON COMMANDOS: Designer
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines*
WHERE IS HE NOW? Still at Pyro Studios, working on *Commandos Strike Force*, a tactical FPS in the *Commandos* universe.

WHEN IT comes to great years in PC gaming, there are few that can rival 1998. That annus mirabilis blessed us with a release list that ranged from the sublime to the ridiculously brilliant. You had *Thief*, the first true sneak 'em up; *Champ Man 3*, the sheer addictiveness of which laid waste to countless footy fans' social lives; *Unreal*, which took 3D graphics to hitherto undreamt of heights; *Baldur's Gate*, the title that single-handedly revived the RPG genre; and of course *Half-Life*, arguably the greatest shooter ever to grace our lucky, lucky hard drives.

Standing alongside these fantastic games that year was a title created by an unknown and relatively inexperienced company, hailing from a part of the world not usually linked with games development. It fell into a genre that nobody knew how to describe, and had been roundly rejected by several publishers during development. When Eidos finally took it on and released it in the summer of '98, it went on to sell an amazing two million copies.

The game was *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines*, a real-time squad-based stealth-cum-puzzler (see what we mean about the genre being a tough one to pin down?), and the company was Madrid-based Pyro Studios.

WARGAMES

One of the reasons for *Commandos'* immense success was the fact that it took an entirely fresh style of gaming and stuck it deftly in the middle of a setting that everyone was familiar with – World War II. But the decision to place the title against such an evocative, rich backdrop only came after the initial framework for the gameplay had been laid out.

Project leader and head designer Gonzo Suárez recalls: "*Commandos* came from our desire to create a tactical game based on charismatic characters with specialised abilities, each of which would be useful in solving different situations."

If the idea of having different characters draw on specific abilities to overcome different obstacles sounds somewhat familiar, it may be because the boys admit to taking inspiration from a certain group of suicidal – yet oddly skilled – furry blue critters that had taken the gaming world by storm some years previous.

"The original idea was a sort of *Lemmings*-style game," reveals Pyro Studios co-founder and designer Ignacio Pérez Dolset, who also came up with the concept of basing the puzzler around the covert ops undertaken by British commandos in World War II.

"We thought the WWII setting served as a great free licence for the concept," says Gonzo. And what a novel concept it was. Aside from the faint link with *Lemmings*, and a slight nod to turn-based games like *X-COM* and *Jagged Alliance*, it's hard to find similarities between *Commandos* and any games that preceded it. "From a gaming perspective, there weren't many direct influences," says Ignacio. "We wanted to make something very different from what was traditional in strategy games."

ON A MISSION

The developers gathered their inspiration from stuff they'd seen not on a PC monitor but on the silver screen, taking many of their visual and narrative cues from classic war films. Ignacio reels off the likes of *The Dirty Dozen*, *The Guns Of Navarone* and *A Bridge Too Far* as specific influences, but the game is chock-full of the quirky characters, grand set pieces and sheer blood 'n' guts heroism that typify many a World War II flick.

In some part, the game also owes its distinctive visual style to the world of tabletop wargaming, and the meticulously designed miniature soldiers that populate it. "Lead model figures, rich in detail, were another great influence," remembers Gonzo. "You could say that war movies provided the context and model figures the imagery."

At the time of *Commandos'* release, many games were taking full advantage of the latest developments in 3D graphics processing, but the highly detailed look that Gonzo and Ignacio were aiming for could only be achieved by using traditional 2D sprites and backgrounds.

"3D graphics aren't an actual improvement over 2D graphics," insists Gonzo. "They bring some advantages in certain areas which, given our goals in *Commandos*, we didn't want to exploit." Whatever the reason for their use, the visuals of the game still hold up today, while many of its 3D contemporaries seem distinctly rough around the edges.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

However, the fact that *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* ever made it on to the shelves at all is something of a minor miracle. "The biggest problem was putting together a games development team in Spain," says Ignacio. "Of the 18 team members working on the original *Commandos*, only two had previous experience of working on professional games." Ignacio himself was still only a fledgling designer, having moved over from a role as distributor in the small Spanish games industry to studio founder/designer at Pyro.

"It was an exciting time for us," he continues. "The game was developed in 20 months by a team with an average age of 22. Before *Commandos*, there hadn't been any Spanish games that
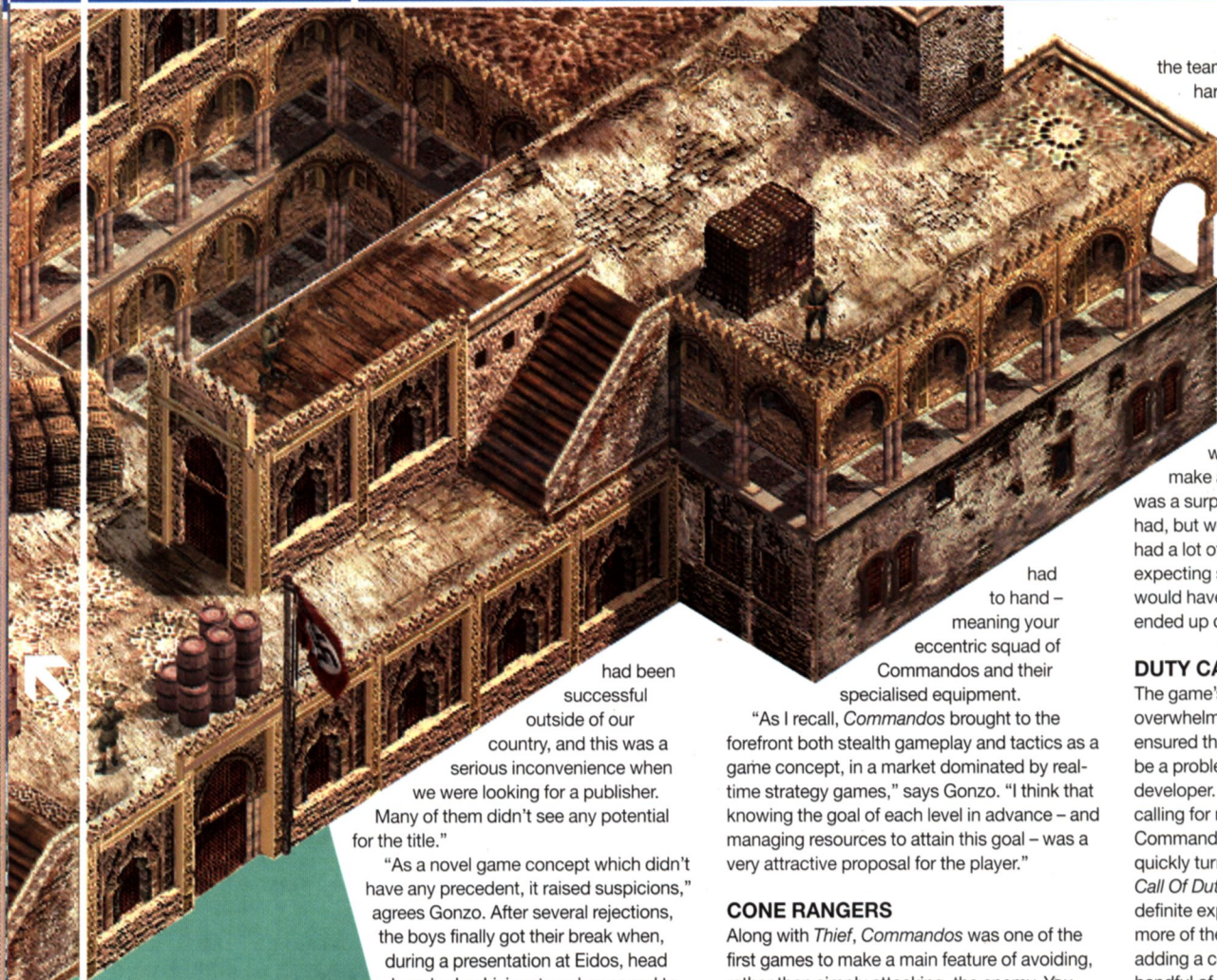
had been successful outside of our country, and this was a serious inconvenience when we were looking for a publisher. Many of them didn't see any potential for the title."

"As a novel game concept which didn't have any precedent, it raised suspicions," agrees Gonzo. After several rejections, the boys finally got their break when, during a presentation at Eidos, head honcho Ian Livingstone happened to pass by the room – and liked what he saw. He offered Pyro Studios a distribution deal for *Commandos*, but even then it was acquired as a back catalogue title to complete Eidos's strategy line-up.

Commandos' style of gameplay was described as 'strategy', but trying to pigeonhole it into an existing genre was impossible. The game's main strength lay in the way it combined elements of stealth, puzzle-solving and real-time strategy. Each level was essentially an elaborately laid out series of puzzles, and you had to approach it methodically using the resources you

had to hand – meaning your eccentric squad of Commandos and their specialised equipment.

"As I recall, *Commandos* brought to the forefront both stealth gameplay and tactics as a game concept, in a market dominated by real-time strategy games," says Gonzo. "I think that knowing the goal of each level in advance – and managing resources to attain this goal – was a very attractive proposal for the player."

CONE RANGERS

Along with *Thief*, *Commandos* was one of the first games to make a main feature of avoiding, rather than simply attacking, the enemy. You had to keep your squad members hidden or unobserved much of the time, which meant shunning noisy guns in favour of knives and hiding any dead bodies. Enemy AI was particularly advanced for its day, with Nazis investigating footprints and sounds, and raising the alarm at the sight of a lifeless comrade. Particularly ingenious was the vision cone used to visually represent an enemy soldier's line of sight; a nifty feature later appropriated by games like *Desperados* and *Star Trek: Away Team*.

One thing many people remember about the game is its sheer difficulty: if one of your team was spotted by a German patrol, it was generally dirtnap time for him and quick load time for you. Getting the correct balance between making the game taxing and making it downright exasperating was very important to

the team. "Even though *Commandos* is a hard game to beat, you have a sense that it *is* possible to beat it, and that you're improving with each attempt," says Gonzo. "This makes the difficulty something which, rather than being frustrating, is a challenge. When I encounter this kind of difficulty in a game, it's something I find extremely addictive."

And the sales figures would suggest that he isn't the only one. Even if the challenging nature of the game had us pulling out our hair, kicking pets or coming out with the sort of language that would make an Osbourne blush, we loved it. "It was a surprise having the sort of success we had, but we thought at the time that the game had a lot of potential," recalls Ignacio. "We were expecting sales of around half a million, which would have been a big success for us – but we ended up doing close to two million."

DUTY CALLS

The game's triumphant sales run and overwhelmingly positive critical reception ensured that publisher interest would no longer be a problem for this particular Spanish developer. Both the public and Eidos were soon calling for more covert antics from the Commandos, and Pyro Studios duly obliged, quickly turning out *Commandos: Beyond The Call Of Duty*, which Gonzo describes as "a definite expansion pack" aimed at giving you more of the same style of gameplay, while adding a couple of new characters and a handful of skills. After this was released in March 1999, the boys settled down to work on a true sequel.

"*Commandos 2: Men Of Courage* was a completely different approach," says Gonzo. "We aimed for a higher replayability value, offering players very different ways to solve the challenges." Indeed, while the sequel possessed the same overall feel as its predecessor, the gameplay style shifted slightly to give you a lot more freedom in how you approached each level.

The highly detailed graphics were also kicked up a notch or two. Some of the levels were awe-inspiringly immense, with the beautiful recreations of Colditz Castle and the Eiffel Tower being particularly memorable. Although the backdrops remained resolutely two dimensional, characters, vehicles and the interiors of buildings all went 3D, as graphics had improved

DID YOU KNOW?

Pyro Studios was so keen on capturing the spirit of old World War II movies that it even explored the possibility of buying the licence of classic 'men on a mission' flick *The Dirty Dozen*.

THE FUTURE

COMMANDOS SPAWNED A WHOLE NEW GENRE – HOW CAN YOU TOP THAT?

Aside from the likes of *Desperados* and *Star Trek: Away Team*, which are near clones of the original *Commandos*, there have been few games that fall into the same specific genre as Pyro Studios' masterpiece. And at this point, it's hard to see this niche expanding much further. Even Pyro Studios, a company that's built its entire reputation almost solely on this type of franchise, is steering the *Commandos* franchise in a radical new direction.

Needless to say, aspects of the gameplay have already been absorbed into other game-types such as stealth action and RTS, and the spirit of *Commandos* will certainly live on. However, as for the sub-genre created by *Commandos* in 1998, it could easily disappear as quickly as it came.
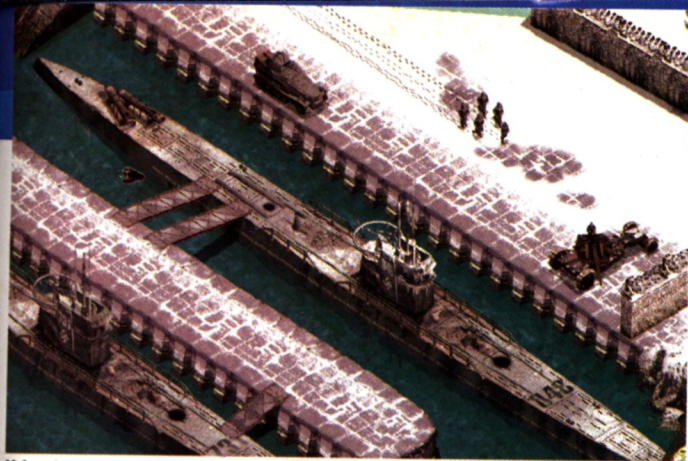
Looks like Fritz left the gas on.

Distract Jerries while the Sapper runs for explosives.

U-boats presented a tempting but heavily guarded target.

sufficiently by the 2001 release date to work this successfully into the visual style.

New characters were introduced and the existing ones overhauled and made more flexible. The classic war movie influences were retained, with one level seeing the team – aided and abetted by a POW named Guinness – sent to destroy the infamous bridge on the River Kwai. Once again, the gaming press fell over themselves to declare the game a masterpiece, the public responded equally enthusiastically and Pyro Studios had another hit on its hands.

So what did the creators themselves make of the sequel? "While the game had many new features and some of the problems of the original *Commandos* were addressed, it also lost some of its simplicity, which was one of the beauties of the original," says Ignacio candidly.

Gonzo, meanwhile, points out that although he was obviously pleased at the success of the first two *Commandos* games, he was slightly concerned about the effect it would have on the team. "Such a success encourages repetition of the same formula, which doesn't enrich the outlook of the games industry."

CREATURE FEATURE

While Ignacio and the rest of Pyro Studios started working on a third *Commandos* title, Gonzo decided that he needed a change of scenery, and decamped to start up his own Madrid-based development house, Arvirago Entertainment. He took with him several members of the *Commandos* team, including lead programmer Jon Beltrán De Heredia Olazábal. They're now working on a strategy title, *The Lord Of The Creatures*.

"It's a game in which, as well as tactics, we've included a lot of content based on collecting," says Gonzo. "The main collectibles are creatures which, with their specific abilities, can be used in combination to confront new and different challenges. We're sure that the influence of our previous work will show up in one way or another."

Commandos 3: Destination Berlin, meanwhile, was launched last year to

a generally positive response, if one not quite as fervent as had been given to the series' two previous games. Our own Mark Hill commented that, although the game remained addictive and enjoyable, it lacked variety and offered little in the way of improvements over *Commandos 2*.

Perhaps it comes as no surprise to learn that Pyro Studios is moving the franchise in a fresh direction with *Commandos Strike Force*, a more action-oriented tactical shooter. "It's very different from anything we've done in the past," smiles Ignacio. "It's going to surprise a lot of people."

Whatever becomes of the series, the developers can look back on the initial *Commandos* game with pride. It's a game, after all, that looks eminently comfortable in the company of that fantastic class of 1998. But what was it about that first finished product that pleased the developers the most?

"I would say its originality, together with the fact that it was so well received by the players," says Gonzo. Ignacio shares a similar sentiment: "The best thing was making a game that was totally different from any existing titles. We created our own category and invented the rules for it." And in an industry where innovation is so rare, you can't ask for much more than that. PCZ

FAMILY TREE

Following the enormous success of *Commandos*, several developers shamelessly aped the formula in games such as *Robin Hood* and *Star Trek: Away Team*. Elsewhere, some of the game's more innovative features crossed genres, making their way into stealth action titles like *Hitman* and *Splinter Cell*.

Year		
1991	LEMMINGS	
1994		JAGGED ALLIANCE
1998		**COMMANDOS**
1999		COMMANDOS: BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY
2000		
2001	DESPERADOS / STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM	COMMANDOS 2
2002	ROBIN HOOD: LEGEND OF SHERWOOD	
2003		COMMANDOS 3
2004		
2005	COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE	LORD OF THE CREATURES

This mission saw you sneaking round a Nazi-infested North African port.

Looks like somebody's compensating badly.

"The game was developed in 20 months by a team with an average age of 22"

IGNACIO PÉREZ DOLSET
CO-FOUNDER, PYRO STUDIOS
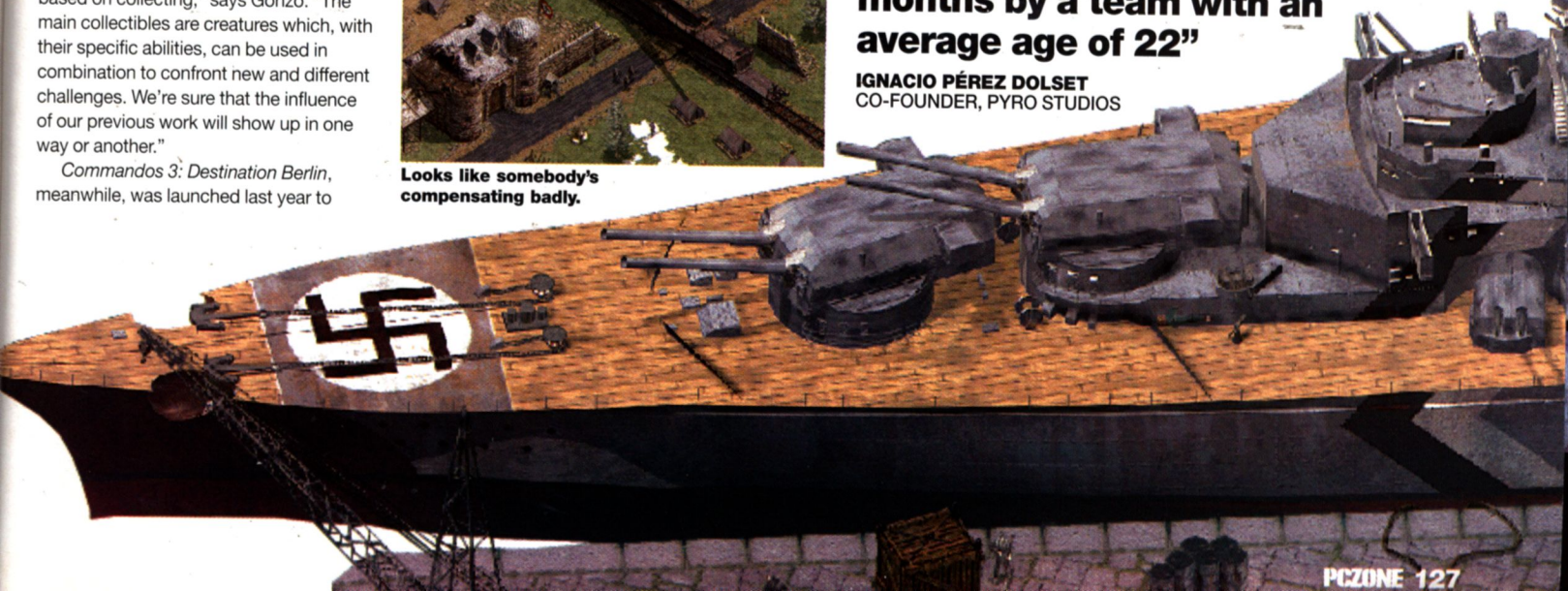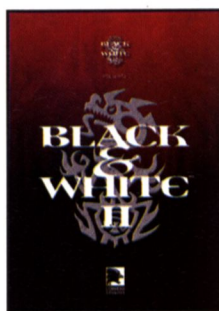
THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

After the fifth instalment of the *Black & White* Diaries, you demanded to know more about the story. You speak, *John McLean-Foreman* listens

SPOILER ALERT: if you don't want to know anything about the story of the forthcoming *Black & White 2* until you play it, we suggest you look away now. But if you fancy a little inside knowledge, read on.

In the game, the main story follows the growth of Dimitrios, a young, guilt-ridden Greek acolyte thrust unwillingly into the role of High Priest as he becomes the charismatic leader of an empire. Guided by the hand and word of god (that's you), Dimitrios must rescue the Greek civilisation from the edge of extinction and either bring peace to the world or seek bloody revenge against the murderers of his people – it's up to you.

IN THE BEGINNING
The game opens in darkness, and a melancholic voice begins to speak: "I can't help but wonder what my life would have been like if there had been no betrayal, if the Grecian-Egyptian alliance had never crumbled, if the Aztecs had never come…"

For decades, the delicate balance of power between the five races and their gods had kept the world in relative peace, but no longer. Tezomoc, High Priest of the Aztecs, has finally managed to drive a wedge between the Greeks and the Egyptians, thus allowing his hordes to sweep unchecked across the planet. The terrible Aztec Creature has been unleashed; and the jaguar and eagle soldiers have been given instructions to

slaughter every last man, woman and child in the Greek empire.

With his city collapsing around him, Euronymous, the original High Priest of the Greeks, turns to face the Aztec army. Beside him, the mighty Greek Minotaur, fully ten times the height of a man, draws upon the power of the gods. If they can survive just long enough, then perhaps the young acolyte Dimitrios can escape with a handful of other survivors and begin again.

FIVE ALIVE
Each of the five races has their own story arc, which ties into the overall story (which also changes based on how you play). If you're an evil bastard, then some characters oppose you, while

> ## "By making major characters real, we hope you're drawn into their lives and grow to care for them"
> **JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN** FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD

others are more likely to come to your aid. What we're really hoping for is that by making each of the major characters as real as possible – with as deep a background as is feasible – that you're drawn more into their lives, grow to care for them and feel compelled to interfere in their future. What good is it being a god if you can't play favourites?

The following is an excerpt from the opening cut scene of Land 04. In it, Taranaga, a Japanese Daimyo and warlord, has been converted to the Greek (player) cause on an earlier land. Taranaga approaches the Japanese High Priest, Hiroku, in an

attempt to persuade him to join with Dimitrios, your High Priest.

NOTE: anything below that is listed as subtext won't make it into the final script. We've left it in so that you can compare the underlying emotions to what's actually shown in the script, and ultimately shown to you in the cut scenes.

TARANAGA SUBTEXT
Taranaga loves and honours his old lord and also understands why Lord Hiroku thinks he's a traitor. However, Hiroku hasn't heard Dimitrios speak, nor has he felt the touch of god. How can anyone really understand a man's motivations if they haven't yet experienced such divinity? The best tactic to sway Hiroku is to rely on the friendship he once had with Taranaga. Hiroku is a logical man, surely he'll listen to a diplomatic proposal?

TARANAGA DIALOGUE
Lord Hiroku, I understand why you're angry, but the Norse have already joined us. With your help…

HIROKU SUBTEXT
Hiroku is disdainful of Taranaga's offer. He has seen the burning fires of fanaticism in the eyes of men before, and the only way to deal with zealots is by being direct. He doesn't want to go to war unless necessary, but he'll do what he has to in order to protect his land. He can't risk angering his master Tezomoc, High Priest of the Aztecs. Hiroku also feels hurt and saddened that he would be betrayed by his closest friend.
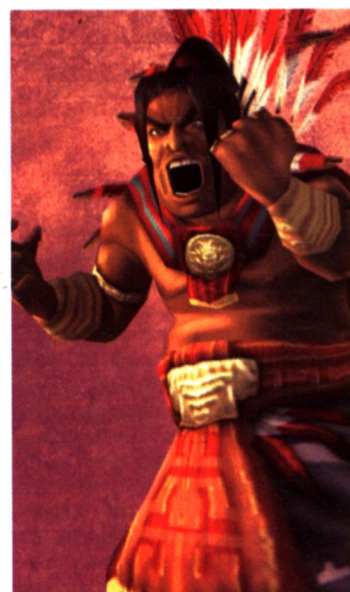
Looks to me like someone's ruffled his feathers…

HIROKU DIALOGUE
You tell Dimitrios that if he's not out of my territory by tomorrow, I'll run both him and his god back into the ocean.

MOTEC (AZTEC AMBASSADOR) SUBTEXT
When Lord Tezomoc conquered the Japanese, he should have deposed and executed Hiroku. Instead, he's left the man in charge of most of his old empire, and Motec, who should be running this kingdom, has to constantly deal with this irritating man who resists him at every opportunity – always within the law.

"God, how I hate him. Look at this! The Greeks have landed with an army, and Hiroku isn't even mobilising his soldiers in order to kill the invaders. Well, we'll see about that. Regardless of who is nominally in charge, I'm the one with the power here."

(ACTUAL ACTION IN SCRIPT)
Motec, the Aztec Ambassador bursts imperiously through the doors with a bang!

MOTEC DIALOGUE
Guards, execute this messenger and then spread the word. We attack the Greeks immediately.

So, that's the sort of thing we write for every line of dialogue. It may seem like a lot, but it really helps to keep every character behaving like an individual. The scene continues to twist and turn as these three men, each with their own agenda, try to achieve their individual desires at the expense of the other two.

Hopefully that's enough to satisfy the plague of people that fell on us en masse, demanding to know more about the story. If you didn't want to know anything but couldn't resist, don't worry – this is just a taste of things to come. **PCZ**

We've set up a forum where you can tell us exactly what you want to read in forthcoming Lionhead Diaries. Vent your spleen at boards.bwgame.com

Things were turning ugly in the Big Brother house.

NEXT MONTH

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

My precioussssssss! Full in-depth preview of EA's fantasy strategy spectacular, from the makers of *C&C* and *Red Alert*! Unmissable exclusive screenshots, artwork and interviews – only in *PC ZONE*!

PLUS

F.E.A.R.
Huge preview of the new shooter from the makers of *AvP2* and *NOLF2*

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5
Goooaalll! World's first look!

STAR WARS SPECTACULAR!
Exclusive plays of *Star Wars: Battlefront* and *Star Wars Galaxies: Jump To Lightspeed*

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE
The next chapter of the *Call Of Duty* universe exclusively unveiled

ALL THE BIGGEST DEMOS AND MOVIES!

DON'T MISS THE NEXT ISSUE OF PC ZONE: ON SALE JULY 22

46 TO BOOK, POP INTO YOUR LOCAL TRAVEL AGENT, OR CLICK ON www.takemestraighttohell.co.uk

FLIGHT DETAILS
Heathrow – Guam

TRANSFER TIME
Transfer time to Cabutu by Chinook and orange dinghy approx. two hours

MICRONESIA

CABUTU

PLAYA DE LA TRIGENA RESORT

A fertile region, sheltered by the charming ruins of a giant facility that once pushed science to its most fascinating limits, the Playa De La Trigena's year-round climate and highly individual wildlife make it the ideal holiday resort.

Micronesia boasts crystal clear blue waters, burnt-out buildings overlooking picturesque harbours and mercenary graves covered with spring flowers. Eat freshly caught pan-fried Squeaker while chatting to friends, or party with nocturnal locals until dawn!

Cabutu, the hub of this delightful island chain, has a rich cultural history. Young and old are inspired by attractions as varied as the Krieger Memorial Volcano Bowl Spa Complex or the Genetic Deviance Fantasy Fun Park.

So whether you want to top up your tan or sample the traditional Micronesian hospitality, you're bound to find out what the locals really mean when they say that in Micronesia, you really 'git some'
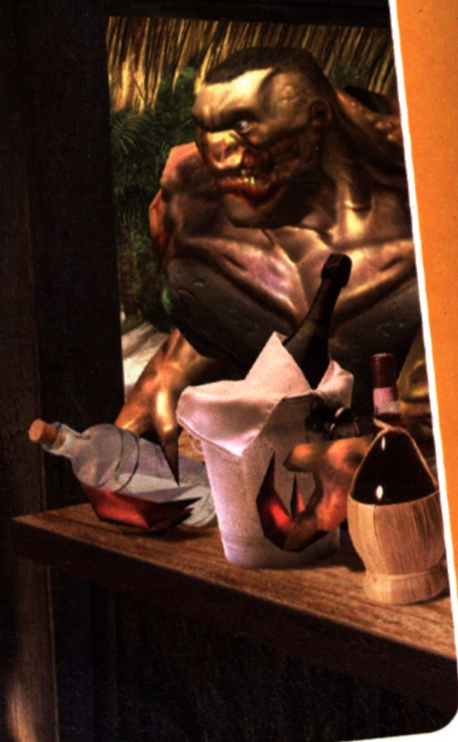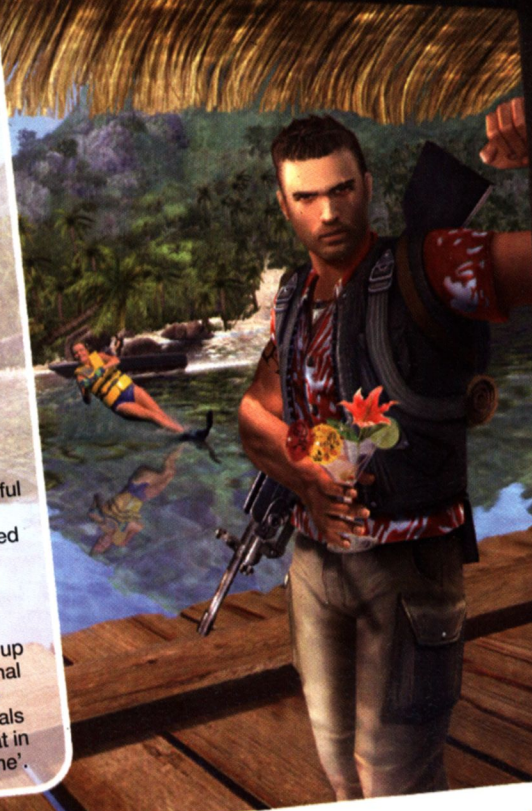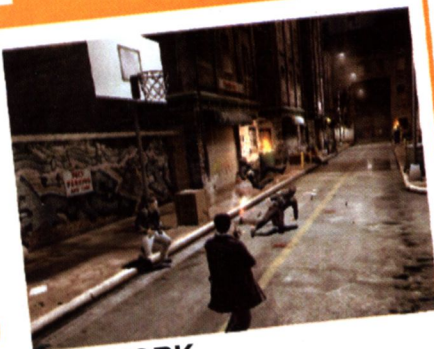
- HALF-BOARD OR SELF-CATERING. EAT OUT OR HUNT YOUR OWN!
- ADORABLE RUSTIC ACCOMMODATION WITH SEA VIEWS AND PROTECTIVE IRON BARS.
- OUTDOOR POOL AND INDOOR FLOODED LABORATORY. A DIVERS PARADISE!
- EACH PACKAGE BUNDLED WITH COMPREHENSIVE ARMAMENTS DEAL.
- TRAVEL INSURANCE A NECESSITY, MAKE SURE YOU'VE HAD YOUR ANTI-MUTAGEN SHOTS!

ACCOMMODATION	PLAYA DE LA TRIGENA			
BOARD BASIS	SELF-CATERING			
RATING	AAA+			
ACCOM TYPE	SHACK		RUSTY SHIP	
NIGHTS	7	14	7	14
Mid 01 Jul – 15 Jul	659	729	799	1019
Mid 16 Jul – 01 Aug	669	739	819	1059
High 02 Aug – 13 Aug	699	779	869	1129
High 14 Aug – 28 Aug	819	899	989	1239
Mid 29 Aug – 12 Sep	729	799	899	1099
Mid 13 Sep – 30 Sep	679	759	829	1049

ALSO CONSIDER

NEW YORK
Whether you want to holiday in real-time or slow-motion, the grit and glamour of the Big Apple never ceases to amaze. It's got the lot, with whores, junkies and gun-dealers, mixing with the resident Italian and Russian communities to provide the ultimate home away from home. New York is your urban nightmare!

HELL
Some like it hot, so why not try this unique opportunity to burn in the fires of damnation – not just for a fortnight, but all eternity! First stop is purgatory, where you can enjoy a relaxing time with other tortured souls, dipping your toes in the River Styx before relaxing on the end of a spike at Beelzebub's behest. One for the devil in you!
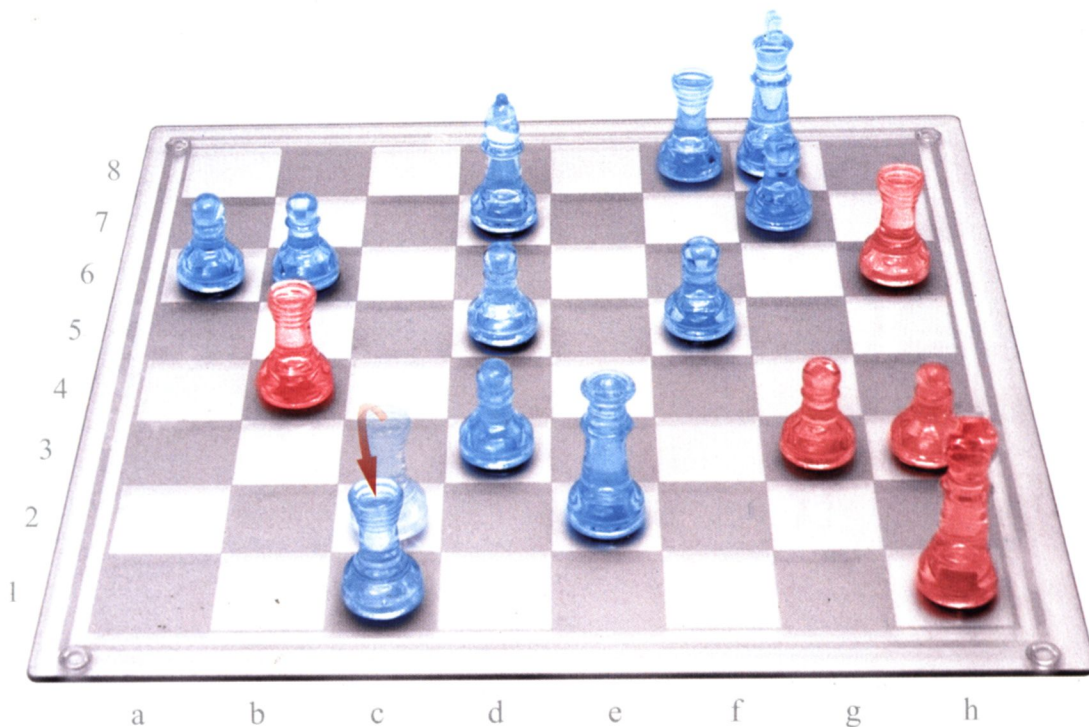
ITALY
Relax with friends before a hectic day at the marketplace, while soothing opera music sweeps over a beautiful Italian piazza. With ridiculously easy access to shops, a vibrant cultural mix of tourists and bountiful sniping positions, you know that this is the place that you want to Go! Go! Go! to.

ILLUSTRATION Phil Clark